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OR,

"Git Thar" Owney in a New Role.

BY GEO. C. JENKS,
AUTHOR OF "DOUBLE-CURVE DAN," "GIT THAR
OWNEY THE UNKNOWN," "GIT THAR
OWNEY'S PLEDGE," "THE DEMON
DOCTOR," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

▲ RASCALLY SCHEME DEFEATED.

THE Euterpia Theater, New York, was lighted up for the coming performance.

It was a quarter to eight, and the curtain was to rise at eight o'clock for the presentation of Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, "The Mikado."

The auditorium was nearly filled, and the ushers were skipping up and down the aisles.

"I SAVED YOU FROM THE VILLAIN!" SHE GASPED, AS, OVERCOME WITH EXCITEMENT, SHE FELL FAINTING INTO THE YOUNG SINGER'S ARMS.

seating those who preferred to wait until nearly time for the opening chorus before entering the theater. All was bustle, life and light, and parquette, boxes and dress circle were rapidly becoming a sea of faces, shining with anticipation of pleasure to come.

The members of the orchestra were filing into their chairs one by one, tuning their instruments and chatting with each other, waiting until the leader, in all the magnificence of evening dress, white tie and hair painfully brushed and scented, should condescend to make his appearance.

On the stage, behind the curtain, the busy note of preparation was being sounded. The scene, a Japanese garden, with plenty of fans, umbrellas and lanterns of many-colored paper, had been "set," the stage-carpenter dodging here and there, putting the finishing touches.

A few young men and girls, members of the chorus, in the quaint Japanese costumes now so familiar to every one through "The Mikado," strolled about the stage exchanging a few words of badinage with the stage hands or telling each other that they were "frightfully out of voice to-night," while the stage-manager, a short fussy man with a flabby face, who would later in the evening appear as the Mikado walked backward and forward in his shirt-sleeves perspiring profusely, as he looked to see that everything was all right.

"Orchestra in! First act!" he bawled, and the elegant leader, who had been peeping at the audience through a small hole in the curtain, made a frantic dive for a narrow, crooked staircase that led below the stage in one corner. A moment later he emerged, smiling and serene, in the orchestra, and sat down to his piano.

"Mr. Graul," exclaimed the principal comedian, dressed for Koko, the Lord High Executioner, "before you ring up the curtain, you had better tell us what we are going to do for a leading tenor to-night."

"What do you mean?" asked the fussy stage-manager, shortly; "where's Piper?"

"Sick."

"Sick? Sick? Why didn't he say so before? Where is he? I'll fine him \$10. What does he mean by getting sick five minutes before the curtain goes up? Sick, indeed! Doesn't he know that we haven't a tenor in the company that can sing the music of Nanki-Poo?"

"Guess he does," answered the comedian, coolly. "I thought I'd just tell you, however. He is sitting in his dressing-room, with a flannel bandage around his throat, and a voice that can't go above a whisper. He thought he would be all right by this evening, but he has got worse."

Long before the comedian had finished his remarks the stage manager was in the tenor's dressing-room. He found that artist sitting disconsolately on a trunk, half-dressed for his part in the opera, and wondering what he should do when the time came for him to sing.

"Well, Piper, what is this I hear about your being sick?" blurted out Graul, as he entered the stuffy little dressing-room.

"My voice has gone back on me," answered Piper, in a wheezy whisper.

The stage-manager's mouth opened in dismay as he heard the wheeze, and he rushed away to the stage to see what he could do about filling Piper's place. It was out of the question that he should attempt to sing to-night.

The orchestra was rattling away on the overture, and the magnificent leader was watching for the signal from behind the footlights to play the music that accompanies the rise of the curtain for the opera.

The members of the chorus were crowded on the stage—its male contingent in the half-circle ready to sing their opening number, "We're gentlemen from Japan, while the girls were huddled behind the wing to wait for their cue.

With the eye of a veteran Peter Graul looked over the group of men and shook his head.

"There isn't one of them that could do it," he muttered, "even if he knew the music." Then aloud: "Will any of you do the leading tenor part, Nanki-Poo, to-night?"

No one volunteered, and Graul shrugged his shoulders in despair, when one little fellow, with a remarkably thin, discordant voice, who was retained in the company only because his sister was a useful member, offered to do the part.

The stage-manager fairly howled at this, and the young man retreated to the ranks and was heard no more.

The situation was a desperate one. The audience were getting impatient, and were manifesting the fact by stamping and shuffling their feet. Something must be done promptly.

Poor Graul was hotter and flabbier than ever. "Where can I get a tenor?" he wailed pitifully.

"I will sing for you!"

The offer was in a clear, boyish voice, and came from the lips of a bright young fellow, about twenty years of age, dressed in blue overalls and the general habiliments of a scene-shifter. He had a ruddy complexion, piercing gray eyes, and a wealth of blonde curls, which showed themselves under the old hat he wore like the nimbus of a saint.

"What is your name? What do you know about singing? How long have you been employed in the theater?"

The young fellow answered the three questions one after the other in regular order.

"My name is Arthur Graham, but I have been nicknamed Flute! I have been a member of a musical society for seven years, and have sung the role of Nanki-Poo in the Mikado three times in amateur performances. This is my first night in this theater. The stage-carpenter took me on as an extra."

"Humph! I'll have to try you. Come with me to the dressing-room and get into the clothes."

He walked rapidly across the stage, and then, telling the young man to wait a moment, ran back to the place where the curtain-bell hung, and rung up the curtain. Then, as the opening chorus of the opera arose in a lusty burst of harmony, he led the new tenor to the dressing-room, and with his own hands assisted him to put on the costume of Nanki-Poo.

"Sure you know the music and all about it?" whispered Graul, as he stood in the wings by the side of the new tenor, who was waiting until his time came to go on.

The young man did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon the face of a man standing behind a wing on the opposite side of the stage, who, made up hideously for Pooh-Bah, had taken off his Japanese wig and revealed a luxuriant head of hair, pure white.

"Who is that man?" he asked, with a desperate effort to control his voice.

"What man? Never mind about him now. Keep your thoughts on your business, or you'll break down," returned the stage-manager, impatiently.

"But—tell me—who is he? I think I have seen him before," persisted the other.

"I dare say you have seen him before. He has been a member of this company for some time. His name is Roundel—Norman Roundel. Now, go on. There's your cue."

A slight push from Graul, and Arthur Graham was before the audience! He walked gracefully toward the footlights, and, after a few words spoken, prepared to sing his first solo.

"A wandering minstrel, I, a thing
Of shreds and patches,"

rung out a voice, clear and sweet as a bell, as the young man proceeded with the ballad that every one knows as one of the most taking that Gilbert & Sullivan ever produced.

"Flute! Yes, indeed, that's his name," ejaculated Graul, delightedly, as the audience burst into a perfect hurricane of applause. "I never heard such a voice in comic opera before. It is as sweet and clear as a flute."

The fussy stage-manager did not trouble himself any further about the new tenor, now. He hastened to his own dressing-room, and was soon painting away at his face and putting on the costume worn by the Mikado.

At last Nanki-Poo came off the stage. As he did so he almost stumbled over the regular tenor, Ezra Piper, who was sitting on a low stool just behind a wing.

"You sung that very well," said Ezra, in his wheezing whisper. "Allow me to congratulate you."

He put out his hand. Graham took it, but let it fall. It was cold and clammy, and the young man could not repress a shudder.

"I guess you are not well," he observed, trying to speak carelessly.

"Not very," was the answer, as Graham passed on to get a glass of water, for his throat was hot and parched.

As the young fellow walked away, Norman Roundel stepped over to Ezra Piper and whispered something in his ear.

Piper started.

"Are you sure?" he gasped, huskily.

"Quite. And what's more, I believe he knows us, and is in this theater for nothing else than to pipe our lay!"

As Norman Roundel uttered these mysterious words he snarled like a wolf-dog, making himself look absolutely demoniacal in his Japanese make-up.

"But why should he come here?" asked Piper, as, the act over and the curtain down, he moved into a dark corner with Roundel.

"Simple enough. He wants to keep a close watch, and he thinks he can spot us if he stays in the theater."

"What shall we do?"

"Shut him off, right away."

"How?"

Norman Roundel took from his belt a keen dagger that he wore in the character of Peoh-Bah, and felt its edge and point significantly.

"Wouldn't do!" wheezed Ezra—"unless he was to attack me first. Then it would be self-defense."

"I have it," exclaimed Roundel, after a pause.

"Well?"

"I have made it a point to become very familiar with this stage."

"Yes?"

"I will go below and take out the supports of that center trap. You get him in conversation and see that he walks across it. Then—"

A significant wink finished the sentence.

"But—isn't it dangerous—for us, I mean?"

"Ezra, you were always a white-livered cur. If you weren't such a good workman with the drill and jimmy I would have shaken you, long ago. This fellow knows us, I tell you, and we must stop his coming to the theater or going anywhere else for a week or two."

"He might break his back if he falls down there," whined Ezra. "How bad that would be."

Roundel grinned, and Piper pulled down the corners of his lips derisively. Then the former went down below the stage to do his part in the nefarious job, and Piper looked around for Flute, as everybody on the stage was already calling the new tenor.

As the conspirators moved out of the corner, a young girl, in a neat street costume, stepped from behind a dusty scene, and, with parted lips, through which the breath came quickly and convulsively, gazed sternly after them.

"The villains!" she whispered, with her pretty white teeth tightly clinched. "I'll foil them. He's too nice a young man to suffer at their hands."

She blushed slightly, even though there was no one to hear her expressed admiration of the new tenor.

"I must be quick," she added. "They're going to do it right now."

The stage hands had finished setting the scene for the second act, and the girl, looking at the center trap, saw it tremble slightly.

Roundel was ready for his victim!

Ezra Piper was walking toward it, holding the new tenor by the arm, and talking to him earnestly, with the object of preventing the latter from noticing his steps carefully.

Surely, but apparently unconsciously, Piper was walking toward the trap. The young girl was on the other side of the stage. She could not warn the young stranger; he would not understand her.

The two men had now reached the edge of the trap, when for some reason Arthur Graham stopped.

The girl saw Piper try to force his companion upon the trap, and saw the latter resist. She flew across the intervening space, seized Piper by the arm, and, with a sudden twist, pushed him upon the trap.

There was a rattle, a crash, a smothered cry, and Ezra Piper sunk out of sight into the dark pit below the stage.

"I saved you from the villain!" she gasped, as, overcome with excitement, she fell fainting into the young singer's arms.

CHAPTER II.

TIGER JIM'S WARNING.

"HALLOA! Halloa! What's all this?" demanded the fussy stage-manager, as in the grotesque dress of the Mikado, he hustled to the spot.

"A snake crushed by this little girl," answered Arthur, "and I think she's crushed him very effectively."

"Well, well, that's strange! I don't know just what you mean. But—but—clear the stage. Second act! We can't wait. Bob, fix that trap! That's right. Blanche, get up here!"

He shook the young girl, but she was utterly unconscious, and no amount of shaking had any effect upon her.

"Well, well, carry her off, Mr.—Mr.—Flute. We cannot stop the performance. Here, second act, everybody! Get ready!"

The young man carried the young girl—whom

Graul had addressed as Blanche—to a dressing-room that opened on the stage, where she could be attended by some of the chorus girls, and then looked around for Piper, just as the curtain rose again, and the opera went merrily on.

And where was Piper?

When he dropped through the trap, he clutched wildly at anything that might save him, but everything slipped away from him, and he fell in a disgruntled heap upon Roundel, who had not had time to get out of the way, and who stood immediately below.

The only light came from a gas-jet, turned very low, that blinked in a small wire cage several feet away.

Roundel, expecting nothing less than to see Piper fall into the snare laid for the new tenor, and furious because he had himself been compelled to sustain the shock of the falling body, struck out with all his force at Piper, and knocked him over a heap of dirty armor—helments, breastplates, etc., stored in a corner.

"What in thunder are you doing, Mr. Roundel? Don't you know me?"

"Piper?"

"Yes, Piper, and all broken up," wheezed that person.

"Where is the other fellow?"

"On the stage, I guess. He's all right."

"Curse him! How did he manage to fool us?"

"He couldn't have done it himself, but that girl, Blanche Rogers, came along and gave me a shove just when I bad him where I wanted him. The consequence was that—"

"You fell down the hole, and Blanche and Flute, as he calls himself, are laughing at you."

Piper clinched his fist.

"Look out. Let us get away from here. We don't want anybody to know that I sprung this trap," added Roundel, as he saw the stage-carpen-ter coming down the narrow stairs.

The two men stepped aside, and as soon as the carpenter, with many expressions of wonder-ment as to how the trap had become unfastened, had propped it up securely again, they sneaked up the stairs and separated. Roundel, in his character of *Poo-Bah*, got ready to go on the scene, and Piper went to his dressing-room to wait for him.

From the door of the dressing-room he could look across the stage, and note every triumph of the new tenor, who was playing his part so successfully.

"That isn't the only thing you are doing on cue," he muttered. "I wonder what you are here for, at all? I guess Roundel is right, and you are playing the spy act on us. Well, wait awhile, Ezra Piper, and if you find him out, it is easy enough to fix him."

There was a drawing back of the thin lips as he said this that made Mr. Piper look rather more unprepossessing than usual.

"Halloo, Blanche!" he exclaimed, a few moments later, as he saw the girl, with a white face, making her way across the stage, at the back of the scenes. "You look sick."

The only answer was a look of unutterable disdain.

"Oh, now, Blanche, you needn't be so stiff with me. I have more reason to be offended than you. You might have broken my neck when you pushed me down that trap."

"I did not push you down the trap."

"You didn't?"

"No."

"How do you explain that? You gave me a shove and made me step on it, and it let me down, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Very well then. That is what I say."

"But, who fixed the trap so that it would drop?"

"How should I know?"

"Ezra Piper, you do know, and you want to murder that young man, Flute!"

Piper laughed uneasily.

"What makes you think so?"

"I know it!" and her flushed face showed her anger.

"Well, never mind, Blanche; you will know better some day. Let me take you home. You don't want to hang about the theater all the evening when you are not singing, I suppose?"

"Ezra Piper," said the girl, slowly, "you have asked me several times whether I will not tolerate you. You seemed so much in earnest that I did not like to be cruel, but to-night I will tell you that you must not speak to me again. I hate and despise you. Is that plain enough?"

The young girl's blue eyes flashed and she

tossed her golden-crowned head as she said this with an energy that left no doubt of her sincerity.

Ezra looked at her several moments with a lowering brow, and the thin lips parted and showed his teeth, as he snarled:

"Blanche Rogers, this is the last time I shall speak to you until—until—you will be only too glad to speak to me. Remember what I say! This new fellow has come here and has carried you away at the first glance. You have thrown me over for him, and I will get even with both of you!"

He shut the dressing-room door with a bang, and the young girl, with a smile curling her pretty lip, walked carelessly away.

She stood and watched the progress of the opera. Flute had already established himself as a strong favorite with the audience, and his triumph was complete.

"I wonder why Piper and Roundel wanted to hurt him," she thought. "Couldn't be only professional jealousy on Piper's part. He never took enough interest in his work for that. And Roundel? He isn't jealous of the new tenor. No, there is some deeper reason, and I am going to find out what it is. I know those two men and I am going to warn Flute before he leaves the theater to-night."

The opera was drawing to a close, and the young girl, who was a member of the chorus, but she had been excused from singing that night at her special request, stood ready to speak to the new tenor as soon as the curtain should fall.

"Flute, eh?" she muttered. "I like to call him by that name. It is only a nickname, but it fits him exactly. His voice is splendid."

The final chorus was being sung now, and as the catchy music crashed through the theater, the voice of Flute rose high above everything, sweet and clear, fairly thrilling the soul of the young girl.

He saw her as soon as the curtain was down.

"How are you?" he asked kindly, taking her hand in his.

"Very well; I was a little excited when I saw your danger, but I can assure you that I do not often faint away."

"I am glad to hear it," he replied cheerfully. "How will you get home? Have you anybody to take you?"

"Well, no," hesitatingly. "Mr. Piper has generally escorted me, but I shall not avail myself of his services any more."

"Indeed? May I have the pleasure?"

A grateful smile was the answer, and the young man hastened away to change his dress.

"Piper, how long will it take your throat to get well?" asked the fussy stage-manager.

Ezra had been standing with Roundel watching the conversation between Flute and Blanche, and both men were evidently ill-pleased with the friendship that had sprung up between the new-comer and the girl.

Piper started as Graul addressed him, and answered, absently. "I don't know. A week, I suppose."

"All right—all right. Then I'll get—what's his name—Flute—to do your part in the mean time."

Graul sailed off to his dressing-room, and Ezra and Roundel continued their conversation.

"That job must be done to-morrow night, sure, Ezra. Everything is ready for it. There will be a fortune in it for us if we do it up right. I have the watchman fixed. His cousin that he expects from Ireland, and whom he has never seen, will arrive at the house about midnight."

"Ah!"

"And the cousin will have a little real old poteen from Tipperary, that has never paid a cent of duty. Do you see? The cousin will send around to the bank for the watchman to come home and taste the poteen."

"Yes?"

"He won't keep the watchman more than a few minutes, he'll say. Well, the watchman will go home, and the poteen will be very good. and the cousin will be a good fellow, and—and I think the watchman will be away from the bank long enough for us to do the job."

Ezra nodded, and then both grinned.

The stage was almost dark now. As is customary in every theater, the lights had been turned out as soon as possible, to save the gas, and only one or two jets relieved the gloom of the great stage.

As Roundel moved away to his dressing-room he came face to face with Flute.

He looked at the young man for a second, and then, as he passed him, managed to turn back the lapel of the undercoat that was almost concealed under a heavy ulster.

A small disk of silver shone in the rays of an adjacent gas jet. It was not larger than a half dollar but it was enough for Roundel.

"Just what I thought," he muttered, as he pulled off his wig and ran his fingers through his white hair. "Just what I thought. All right, Mr. Flute, now I know you. I think I can block your game. 'Git Thar' Owney is too well known to the boys to be able to hide his identity under Flute, or any other nickname."

In the mean time Flute (or "Git Thar Owney," for the tenor was indeed no other than the famous young detective) was thinking—thinking.

Roundel was right. Flute had a purpose in accepting an engagement at the Euterbia Theater, entirely unconnected with the salary he received.

He had suspected Roundel to be some one whom he was particularly anxious to see interviewed by a judge and jury in the Court of Oyer and Terminer, New York. Now he had satisfied himself of his identity, and the rest was only a question of waiting.

"I am afraid you know me, Tiger Jim," he muttered. "But if you do, you also know that 'Git Thar' Owney hasn't earned his sobriquet for nothing. I'll 'git thar,' just as sure as your name is *not* Norman Roundel. Pretty good scheme, you scoundrel, to join an opera company as a cloak to your real business, and one more instance of the way you make use of every talent you possess, but—it won't avail you this time."

He raised his hat to Blanche, and giving her his arm, left the theater.

The Euterbia Theater is up town, and it did not take more than a few minutes to reach the quiet boarding-house on West Thirty-eighth street where Blanche lived.

He parted from her at the door, saw her safely inside, and then lighting a cigar, walked leisurely toward his own home in the bracing wintry air.

He had reached Broadway, and was wrapped in thought as he strolled along with his hands in the pockets of his ulster.

He turned up a street in the vicinity of Madison Square, and stopped at last in front of a handsome residence, with brown stone pillars supporting a massive balcony over the front door, and storm doors to protect the steps from snow and wind.

As he stopped a police officer passed him.

"All right, Dobbs. Stand at the corner out of sight, but within hail. See that I'm not watched," whispered "Git Thar" Owney.

The slightest bend of the officer's head showed that he understood the order, as he walked across the street and stood silently and ghost-like in a deep doorway.

The detective looked up and down the street, and then pulling open one of the storm-doors, went inside like a flash.

Scarcely had he disappeared when a white head under a soft cap bobbed up from the area adjoining, and the voice of Norman Roundel hissed:

"Watch yourself, Owney. Tiger Jim's teeth are sharp, and he's after blood!"

CHAPTER III.

LOCKS, BOLTS AND BARS.

"GIT THAR" OWNEY was evidently no stranger in the house that he entered so boldly at midnight.

Once screened from observation by the storm-doors, he tapped softly at the inner door, and began to leisurely take off his ulster.

There was a click, as a small hole in the panel was opened, allowing a stream of light to shine through, and the detective 'put his face where the light would fall full upon it.

"Mr. Graham, it's you, is it? Just what I thought," exclaimed a cheery female voice.

Then the door opened and "Git Thar" Owney shook hands with the owner of the cheery voice, in the person of a buxom, good-looking woman of about fifty years of age.

"How do you, Mrs. Burton? Is Mr. Argent at home?"

"Yes, sir. He's in the library. I think he expects you."

"I'll step right in, then."

"Come in!" said a voice from the library, in response to "Git Thar" Owney's knock, and the detective entered a luxuriously-furnished room, in the center of which, at a massive library table, sat Mr. Argent, the well-known banker, reading by the light of a shaded student's lamp.

"Ah, Owney, that you!"

"Yes, sir."

"Anything new?"

"I think so."

The banker arose from his chair, and coming close to the detective, looked earnestly into his face.

"What is it?"

"Well," answered Owney, deliberately. "I have received information that your daughter is certainly in the city."

"Where? Where?"

"That I cannot tell at present, though I hope soon to know. When she left the house, a month ago, she did not go to the aunt in Yonkers whom you thought she would seek."

"No, no. I know that. My poor child! My Lucy!"

"She was not without money, and being a bright, sensible girl, she was determined to be independent. So she went to the house of a former maid, on the East side, told her story, and paid her board there for three weeks."

"Yes?"

"A week ago she left, and the maid does not know where she went. All your daughter told her was that she had secured employment, and that it would be necessary for her to live up-town to be near her work. What the nature of that work was she did not reveal."

"Well?"

"Now that we know in what quarter of the city to look for her, it should be comparatively easy to find her. I am sorry you have not a photograph of her."

"So am I, but she never had one taken since she was a baby. She has blue eyes, jet-black hair, is about middle height, and is very pretty. That is the only description I can give you."

The detective took out a note-book, and referring to a certain page, nodded his head.

"Yes, that is what I have here, save that I have in addition a memorandum of the fact that she has a red mark on her right wrist about as large as a ten-cent piece, on which, when at home, she always wore a flat gold bracelet."

"Yes. The bracelet was one that I gave her mother on her wedding-day. She gave it to my little Lucy only a short time before she died. And now to think that my girl is away from me among strangers, and exposed to all the dangers of this great city. It is terrible—terrible!"

The banker walked up and down the soft carpet, pressing his right hand to his brow, and moaning in sheer agony of mind.

"What was the reason that your daughter left?" asked Owney after a pause, during which he had replaced his note-book in an inside pocket and taken a seat near the open fireplace.

"She was always a high-spirited girl, like her mother, and I expect I was disposed to be stern with her. You see, since the death of her mother, Lucy and I have lived entirely alone with Mrs. Burton, and Lucy has always had her own way. The morning on which she disappeared, Lucy and I were taking breakfast alone, when she said something for which I reproved her."

"Yes?"

"She retorted sharply, and I again rebuked her. One word led to another, and at last, I, without thinking what I was saying, told her that she had the same violent temper which had so often imbibed my existence during her mother's life. This made her furious. She arose from the table, dragging off the table-cloth and smashing cups, saucers, plates, and so forth, and flung herself out of the room."

"Lots of spirit, eh?" commented Git Thar Owney.

"Yes. I heard her go out, but supposed that she had only gone to visit some of her girl acquaintances. She never came back."

The banker sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

The detective sat still for a few minutes, respecting the sanctity of grief. Then he got up and said:

"Are you ready to go with me to the bank?"

"Yes, I am ready," responded the banker, as he recovered himself with an effort, and ringing for his valet, invested himself in an ulster as heavy as that worn by "Git Thar" Owney, and a sealskin cap.

"You can go to bed, Slater. I shall not need anything when I come in," observed the banker, carelessly to the valet, who was an English importation, with smug mutton-chop whiskers, quiet manners and a thorough understanding of the duties of a "gentleman's servant," which position he had filled to a lord in "the old country."

"Very well, sir. If you should require anything, sir, you will hardly have to touch the bell, you know, sir," he said, with elaborate politeness, as he bowed and withdrew.

"I suppose I had better take this, eh, Owney?" observed Mr. Argent, as he unlocked a drawer

under the bookcase and took out a 44-caliber Smith & Wesson six-shooter.

"Yes, it is as well," assented the detective, as he took from the pocket of his ulster a revolver the counterpart of the banker's and examined it closely. "I don't think we shall need them, because I am satisfied that the job will not be attempted for at least a week to come, but it is well to be prepared."

The banker and detective left the house together, Mrs. Burton carefully securing both the inner and storm-doors after them.

The two stood on the steps for a moment, and the detective emitted a low whistle.

Like a ghost the officer whom he had addressed as Dobbs, glided across the road and stood before him, close to the iron fence, so as to be as inconspicuous as possible to chance pedestrians.

"Well, Dobbs?"

"No one passed along the street since you went in, sir—not a soul."

"Good. That will do, Dobbs. Stay. Walk ahead, swiftly, so as to be a square or two in advance of us, and go direct to the bank of Argent & Co., on Fourth avenue. Stay in the vicinity, and report to me—cautiously, so as not to be observed—when I come."

Dobbs was gone, hugging the railings all the way up the street and melting around the corner after the usual manner of a well-trained New York policeman.

"Now, Mr. Argent," from Owney, after waiting a few moments to give Dobbs a chance to get away.

The banker and the detective walked swiftly up the street, and reaching Broadway, turned their steps toward the lower part of town.

And even "Git Thar" Owney, sharp-eyed detective as he was, failed to notice the figure of a man, with stern face and snow-white hair, who followed them, with the pertinacity of an evil spirit, keeping just far enough away for safety, but never losing sight of the men he was haunting, for a single instant.

The bank building of Argent & Co. stood in the middle of a block. It was a substantial granite structure, with iron railings to keep the common horde from looking in the large plate-glass windows. The safe faced the doorway. It was a deep vault, imbedded in the solid brick wall, and secured by a very thick steel-lined oaken door, studded with great rivets. It was considered by the officers of the bank to be absolutely impregnable. It is needless to say that the gas was always left burning to its full height all night.

Mr. Argent admitted himself and the detective with a pass-key, and then closed the door.

"Wait a minute. Don't move forward for a minute. We don't want the police from the station here now," said the banker, as he went to a small iron box let into the floor, in a corner behind the counter and made a slight click.

"Oh, I see. Yes, I'd forgotten that."

"I have just thrown the burglar alarm out of gear," explained the banker. "It is a very complete thing of its kind. No one can go within eight feet of the vault without setting bells ringing in three places—the nearest station-house, my residence and that of the cashier.

"Exactly."

"I should like you to examine everything here, and see that there are no weak spots. Then, with the watchman warned to be specially vigilant, we ought to be able to catch those rascals."

"We shall catch them," declared "Git Thar" Owney, with quiet confidence.

The detective walked behind the counters, all guarded by thick plate-glass, with little pigeon-holes for the transaction of business with the public. Then he examined the president's private room at the back, and the cashier's office adjoining it. Each of these rooms had a window, crossed and recrossed with iron bars like a jail, and the windows looked into a narrow paved court, lighted by a street lamp with a powerful reflection that brought out every corner into strong prominence.

"No chance to get in that way," commented the detective, as he glanced through the window. "What is underneath the bank?"

"Nothing," answered the banker. There was some sort of cellar many years ago, but it has been filled up with columns of stone so close together that it is impossible for any one to squeeze between them."

"You are sure of that, are you?"

"Quite sure."

"There would be no possibility of any one being secreted down there?"

"How could there? There are no doors or windows to the place, and if there were, they would not lead to anything save solid masonry."

This building is a heavy one, and the stone pillars were put in to sustain the weight of the superstructure."

"Hum!"

"Do you think it necessary to put in another watchman?" asked Mr. Argent, as the two sat down for a moment in the president's room—the detective on a corner of the table and the banker on the arm of his easy-chair, both looking through the open door into the bank proper.

"No. That is, if your regular watchman is reliable."

"He is."

"I believe he is. I have been watching him since we have been here."

"Watching him? Why, I didn't know that you saw him."

The banker spoke in tones of unfeigned astonishment.

"Possibly not," laughed Owney, in his quiet way, "but I did, nevertheless. Call him."

"Dennis," called the banker.

"Yes, sorr," and a comical face, with a short, turned-up nose, twinkling eyes, and a frame of red hair, that stuck up on top and curled around his chin, peered from a little hutch immediately over the door of the vault.

"I want you to be especially vigilant for a few weeks to come."

"Better say months, or even years," suggested the detective. "This is a big job, and men in the bank-robbing business have plenty of patience. They are content to bide their time, no matter how long it may be in coming."

"You hear that, Dennis?"

"Faith an' Oi do that, sorr. Oi'll kape me eyes paled, an' sorr a wan of me will ever slape a wink at all, at all."

"Well, Owney, I suppose that will do. I have brought you here to enable you to see for yourself how the bank is protected at night. Now, what do you think of it?"

"Pretty well; but, after all, the greatest reliance must be placed on Dennis. By the way, what is his full name?"

"Dennis Carrigan, sorr. Which me own father was Fighting Dennis, of Tipperary, whar Oi was born," put in Dennis, from his little hutch.

"Dennis Carrigan, eh? Well, remember that you are holding a very responsible position," returned Owney.

Mr. Argent had gone behind the counter to arrange the burglar alarm again.

"Confound it! I have done something to this electric button. The apparatus is out of order."

"No?"

"Yes, it is," declared the banker, as he came from behind the counter, flushed with annoyance and the exertion of stooping. "Well, I guess there is no danger to-night. I'll have it repaired in the morning."

A last warning to Dennis, and the banker and detective were on the street.

"Well, Dobbs, what is it?"

The police officer was standing at Owney's elbow.

"A suspicious-looking man passed the bank twice—tall, heavy fellow, with white hair."

"Where did he go?"

"Don't know, sir. The first time he went down the avenue. A few minutes afterward he came back. When he got to the gas-lamp at the corner of this little court I came out of the shadow to speak to him, but he got away somewhere, and I don't know where. I looked down the court but he was not there. You see it is so light that he could not possibly hide. It's a puzzler to me."

The worthy Dobbs took off his helmet and wiped his perspiring brow with a black and yellow handkerchief with a vigor that left no doubt of his mental perturbation.

"Git Thar" Owney was troubled.

He walked down the court and looked carefully in every corner. He gazed up and down the avenue and peered into all the doorways in the vicinity.

No sign of the big man with the white hair.

"Dobbs, you stay here for an hour. If you see that party again, shadow him to his home or wherever he goes. Leave a written report for me at the station. If you do not see him for an hour, why go home and go to bed."

The banker and detective went up town toward the home of the former, both considerably worried over the mysterious movements and subsequent disappearance of the big man with the white hair.

And at that moment, Norman Roundel was sitting, grinning to himself, in the president's easy-chair in the private room in Argent & Co's Bank, while Dennis Carrigan dozed peacefully in his hutch a few yards away.

CHAPTER IV.

"GIT THAR" OWNEY TO THE RESCUE.

"So," muttered Norman Roundel, "we know all about the scheme now, and the electric alarm is out of order. Get it fixed in the morning, will he? Don't think he will. Not if Tiger Jim is attending to his business as he will be, I expect."

He sat back in his easy-chair, threw one leg over the arm, and laughed silently as he cogitated.

"No possibility of any one getting underneath the bank. Ha, ha! No, of course not. And yet—how is it that I happen to be sitting in old Argent's chair in his private room, and—yes, I will do it; why not?—helping myself to his own particular sherry and fancy crackers?"

Roundel arose at this stage of his reflections and going to a closet with plate-glass mirrors in the doors, took out a bottle of sherry, a wine-glass and a silver plate containing some expensive wine crackers. He placed them on the table, and throwing open his ulster, poured himself out a glass of sherry, and prepared to enjoy himself.

The door of the room was nearly closed, so that he could not be seen from the street, and he sat in the easy-chair with as much coolness as if he had been the banker himself taking a noon lunch.

He had just raised the glass to his lips, when he suddenly put it down: and springing noiselessly to his feet, drew a heavy revolver, and with stern face, stood watching the door.

"I guess it was only our friend Dennis snoring," he whispered, after a pause. "Dennis is a good fellow, and I am opposed to bloodshed on general principles. For these reasons I hope that Dennis will keep quietly in his den until I go away. I must stay here an hour to give the policeman a chance to get away and still do his duty. I am much obliged to Owney for giving his orders just where I could hear and profit by them. He's a smart fellow, is Owney, but he won't git thar this trip."

He sat down again and resumed his discussion of the wine and crackers. But he kept the revolver on the table, within easy reach of his hand, and his face never relaxed its expression of intense watchfulness as he sipped and sipped at Mr. Argent's prime old sherry.

A light scratching immediately beneath his chair made him start.

"I'm blessed if I hadn't forgottin all about him. I guess I'll let him come up and get a glass of old Argent's sherry."

He went to a corner of the room, where the closet and the wall made a small recess, and, stooping, turned up a piece of the rich Brussels carpet. The floor underneath appeared to be solid and compact, but a dexterous use of a small crowbar, with a bent and sharpened end, that he produced from an inside pocket, enabled him to open a small trap.

A whistle under his breath into the hole, was followed by the appearance of a head and face, the latter wearing a very discontented expression.

"Come up here, Piper."

"Well, I should say so," wheezed Piper. "I think I've been down here long enough. I don't think this is any way to treat a first-class mechanic. After being around a theater all the evening, hearing another fellow singing my favorite part, and then winding up by being squeezed into a narrow space between two stone walls, a man isn't likely to feel very good; this job ought to pan out big, for the work beforehand is hard enough."

Roundel did not answer, save to motion his partner to be quiet. But he gave his hand to the disgusted little tenor, and with one pull had him standing in the room.

"Take a glass of wine. It is my particular brand."

Ezra Piper reciprocated the grin with which this was whispered, and drank two glasses of the sherry in quick succession.

"Good taing for the voice," he wheezed.

"Excellent."

"Maybe I shall be able to do Nanki-Poo to-night."

"Perhaps so, but I expect you will have other things on your mind. This job must be done to-night."

"Sure?"

"Yes, the burglar-alarm is 'fixed.' There will be some five hundred thousand dollars in the vault, mostly in big notes and negotiable securities, and we can work the cousin racket on Dennis Carrigan very easily."

"Ah! Well, what do you want me to do now? I don't like to hang about a place where

I am going to do a job before it is time to work."

Roundel stepped cautiously to the door, and peeped out. Dobbs was standing on the steps in front of the bank, with his back toward the door.

His hour had expired, and he was preparing to depart, still wondering what had become of the big man with the white hair.

"There is one thing certain, my dear Dobbs," muttered Roundel, apostrophizing the unconscious officer, "it will take a livelier man than you to get the grip on Tiger Jim."

Dobbs looked up the street and down the street, and then Roundel and Piper heard the steady tramp of his No. 11 feet as he marched, with head erect, but in very low spirits, toward the police station.

Carrigan was now fast asleep in his little coop above the vault door, and Roundel opening the door of the private office, walked boldly into the banking-room, followed by Ezra Piper.

"Now, look around you, quickly, Ezra, and see what you have to do, while I stand behind the door-post and keep watch."

Speaking thus, Roundel took up his position where he could not be seen from the street. It was now between two and three o'clock, and Fourth avenue at that particular point was entirely deserted.

Piper glanced up at the window of Carrigan's little hutch. His partner shook his head impatiently.

"He's safe enough, I tell you. The drink he took just before twelve o'clock has settled him. I took care of that. He won't wake up unless you make a great deal of noise."

"I won't do that."

"Well, get to work."

Piper dropped on his knees behind the end of the counter where he would be invisible to any casual passer-by, though a person coming up the steps and looking through the glass door might see his feet.

He wheezed a good deal as he felt in his pockets for certain tools of steel, highly-tempered, with which wood, iron, steel or glass could be overcome swiftly and noiselessly.

"Hurry up, there, Ezra," warned Roundel.

"All right; I'm at work."

Selecting a small crowbar and a screw-driver, with the latter he unfastened some screws that held one of the boards of the flooring in place, and then with the crowbar he lifted the board.

He now had an open place about two feet long and six inches wide.

"Have you got it, Ezra?" whispered Roundel.

"Yes."

"Good. Now fix it."

"I will. Here's the wires lying along as nice as can be," wheezed Ezra, exultantly.

His actions were swift and dexterous. He used a small pair of pincers, with a cutting attachment, such as are used by bell-hangers. With these he severed the wires in two places, taking from each a piece nearly two feet in length—that is, as much as was revealed by the opening."

"Ain't you through yet, Ezra?"

"Very nearly."

Carefully and in a workmanlike manner, Piper replaced the board, covering it with the matting that he had taken up, and leaving no trace of his operations behind him.

"There," he wheezed, complacently. "I think that burglar-alarm is silenced for a few days. Even if they do try to repair it to-morrow, I don't think they will have time to locate the trouble."

"All right, eh?" asked Roundel.

"Yes," chuckled the other. "They will change the batteries and tinker around, and find it won't work. Then they will advance the usual set of theories as to the trouble, and finally they will conclude to leave it for another day."

"Have you taken a general observation, so that you will know how to go to work without any waste of time to-morrow?" asked Roundel, checking his companion's rather dangerous rhapsody.

"Yes, I have seen all I want. I shall make quick time to-morrow."

"Then let us get out."

To the corner of the private office, both went, Piper went down the hole first, followed closely by Roundel, who by a method known only to himself which he had employed successfully in other jobs before this one, replaced the carpet over the loose board from below.

In the cellar there was not too much room, but the contractor who had been paid to build the columns of stone to strengthen the building long

years ago had made a little extra profit by setting some of the columns further apart than was called for in his contract.

Thus a passageway through which a man could squeeze had been left, and had been quickly seized upon by Norman Roundel to aid him in his plan of robbing the bank of Argent & Co.

As had been said, there were no doors or windows to this cellar, but an opening into an adjoining cellar had been made, and communication with the street in a roundabout way established.

The adjoining cellar was under a large dry-goods store, and was used for keeping old boxes, spoiled goods, wrapping paper and similar things.

Roundel and Piper walked swiftly, but quietly through it, like persons acquainted with the locality. From this cellar they let themselves into another, and from thence into a yard.

A door from which a blaze of light streamed opened into this yard.

"Shall we go in, Piper?"

"Yes, I'm parched," answered Ezra, promptly.

"Very well. Though I do not think it is wise. We do not know who we will meet. Anyhow, I'm going to take some precaution."

A quick movement, and Roundel's white hair was covered with a brown wig, while his cheeks were adorned with heavy sweeping whiskers. The change in his appearance was simply marvelous.

"Now, Piper."

"Wait a moment."

An adept in the art of "make up," Piper put some cheek pads into his mouth, and his usually sunken cheeks became plump, completely changing the character of his face. A touch of rouge and a blonde mustache were added, and the most intimate friend of Ezra Piper could not have sworn to his identity.

The two men stepped through the door and found themselves in an all-night saloon.

A voice that they recognized at once as that of Peter Graul, stage-manager of the Euterpea Theater was telling in low tones about the new tenor who had turned up in the nick of time to take the place of a fellow who had lost his voice just at the time when he ought to have had it.

As Roundel and Piper entered the bar-room Graul turned around and saluted them with a boisterous "Good-evening." He had evidently been drinking enough to prevent his vision being as good as usual, or he might, as an old actor, have detected the fact that Roundel's whiskers and Piper's mustache were false. As it was, he took their appearance for granted, and ordered the bartender to "give these gentlemen what they want, at the expense of Peter Graul."

The two new-comers glanced around them and saw that the room was empty save for a stranger with gray hair and spectacles, who sat behind a table at the end of the room puffing a cigar and apparently absorbed in a newspaper.

"In the theatrical line?" asked Graul, patronizingly, as he leaned his elbow comfortably on the bar and looked his new acquaintances over.

"No, sir," answered Roundel.

"Ah! I'm sorry for you. Great business. Merit always rises to the top there—if you have luck, and influence, and money."

"So I've heard."

"Yes, sir. Now, there's a young man at my theater—Euterpea, where the opera of 'The Mikado' is being done with such magnificent success, as we say on the show-bills, ahem!—There's a young man at my theater, who has just come forward as a tenor. Splendid voice, sir! Never heard anything like it in light opera before, sir! Well, our regular tenor—a worthless, skulking fellow—was taken sick, or said he was—lost his voice completely—confound him! I didn't know what to do. Saw a fellow among the stage hands. Knew by the look of his face that he was a singer. Picked him out at once. Said to him: 'Go on and sing the part of Nanki-Poo, and you shall have a hundred dollars a night.' Said he had never sung anything in his life. I told him I knew better. He must go on and sing. Made him get into the costume and forced him on the stage."

"How interesting," wheezed Piper.

"Yes. Well, do you know that young man was so nervous that he couldn't sing his first solo, and I had to sing it from the wing, while he moved his lips and pretended that the notes came from him."

As Mr. Graul uttered this astounding falsehood he looked full into the face of Roundel, as if to impress the truth of his remarks upon him.

"And did the new tenor make a hit?"

"Tremendous! He got up his courage afterward, well enough to sing the rest of his music, and though every one said the first solo was much superior to the others, he pleased the audience very much, and will have a permanent position as leading tenor at my theater."

"And how about the other tenor?"

"The old one, you mean? Oh, he is a miserable scoundrel. I shall be glad to get rid of him. He has only been with us a week. I think I shall thrash him and then kick him out of the theater."

Mr. Graul's weakness was boasting.

As he concluded his last remark something struck him under the chin and laid him flat on his back. He had a vision of an infuriated young man with a blonde mustache, one plump cheek and one flabby one, bending over him, and threatening with horrible oaths to knock his brains out.

Then there was a movement behind the newspaper in the corner, a man with gray hair threw himself upon the stage-manager's assailant, and with one well-directed blow on the chest made him turn a somerset into the yard.

Piper hastily recovered himself, and was about to return to the combat, when the voice of Roundel hissed in his ear:

"Come away, you fool. That's 'Git Thar' Owney. We can't afford to be recognized now."

Piper suffered himself to be led away. When at a safe distance he turned around, and shaking his fist, wheezed vindictively:

"One more score to wipe out with 'Git Thar' Owney!"

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NORTH RIVER.

It was a bright sunny morning when Dennis Carrigan stood on the steps of the Argent Bank, stretching his limbs after his night's vigil.

He had walked all about the interior of the building after a protracted nap in his little hutch, and had satisfied himself that everything was safe.

"Faith!" he yawned, "I must have taken an extra strong wan when I met that man on the avenoo last night. An' he seemed to know all about Teddy Finnegan, too, me cousin. Be the powers, but the whisky was strong. It made the head of me as heavy as lead."

In truth, Dennis did look as if he had indulged rather copiously the night before. His hair was tousled, and his twinkling eyes were surrounded by red rims that gave him an even more comical appearance than usual.

He looked up at the bank clock and gave himself a sleepy shake.

"Where in thunder is that shpalpeen of a nagur, I wondher? Sure, it's past seven o'clock, an' he ought ter be here to shweep and clane. Does he think I want to stay here all day, as well as all night. Begorra, I'll lick him a pelt if he doesn't come soon, now."

Thus grumbling, Dennis walked down the steps to the street and looked down the avenue. Then his face brightened, and he buttoned up his overcoat.

The "nagur," as he called him, and who turned out to be a middle-aged colored man of respectable appearance, with an enormous appreciation of the duties of his position, strolled up in a dignified way, and nodded condescendingly to Carrigan.

"Good mawnin', sah."

"Marning to yerself, Misther Johnson."

"Is yo' health es salubrious es yo' cu'd desire, Mister Cawgan?"

"Yis, I'm feeling pretty good, bless the saints."

"It's er fine mawning, dis hyar."

"Yis, sorry."

"No trouble since I've been gawn, eh?"

"No, sorry."

"Well, I'm gwine ter clean out dis hyar place right away, an' I wants all de room I can git."

As the colored gentleman took off his coat, Mr. Carrigan rightly understood it as a hint for him to retire, and he retired forthwith, while the other, with broom and pail, proceeded to make everything in the bank as clean and shining as labor could make it.

Dennis, with his overcoat closely buttoned, trudged cheerfully down Broadway under the wintry sun. There was no snow, and his iron-shod heels made an invigorating ring on the wind-swept stone sidewalks.

"Darn that drink. It's left the head of me all swelled, be jibes, so that it's a wonder me hat stays on," he grumbled. "It's a good job that none of them burglars we are always hearing about did not choose last night to break the bank. I wouldn't say, begorra, that I'd

have woke up long enough to shoot wan of them."

He marched along down Broadway and made his way to the Courtland Street Ferry, to go over to Jersey City.

The wind blew keenly across the North River, and as Dennis stepped on board the boat he shivered and took refuge in the ladies' cabin.

"Foine lot of girls," he said to himself, "but Oi don't see what in the name of the saints they are going over ter Jersey for at this time in the morning."

He looked approvingly at some half-dozen factory girls, who were evidently going to work in Jersey City, and then his gaze became fixed on a neatly, but plainly-dressed young lady in a tailor-made suit, whose face was concealed by a thick veil, and who sat by the side of the factory girls.

He found himself wondering what she looked like—whether she was pretty, and whether her eyes were blue, in harmony with her golden hair, or whether they afforded the pleasing contrast of brown or black.

There was the usual ringing of bells and blowing of whistles to announce the departure of the boat, and the big, unwieldy craft slowly left the slip, the water under her stern bubbling up angry white, and hissing like a caldron of hell-broth.

"Now for Jersey," muttered Dennis, half-asleep as he settled himself back comfortably in his seat.

He aroused himself sufficiently to notice two strangers strolling into the cabin and seating themselves by the side of the young lady with the tailor-made dress and the thick veil.

One of the strangers, who sat next to the lady, was a slim young man, with flabby face and a wheezy cough. The other was a rough-looking fellow, with marks of whitewash on his working clothes and heavy shoes. His slouch hat came down over his eyes, allowing but little more of his face to be seen than a long, drooping brown mustache. Even on the mustache there was a stray spot of whitewash showing that the wearer had not thoroughly cleansed himself since his yesterday's work.

The boat groaned, jarred and struggled laboriously across the river, stopping occasionally with a ringing of bells, as obstructions came in its way.

The slim young man had been furtively looking at the girl at his side since taking his seat. Whether she was looking at him or not no one could tell, on account of the thickness of her veil.

"Begorra, that young dood is thryin' ter mash that gal. Well, small blame ter him eyther," was Carrigan's sleepy soliloquy, as he buried his chin in the collar of his ulster, and closed his eyes.

The boat had stopped in mid-stream, and the incessant whistling and ringing would have told the passengers that there was some difficulty, even if they had not seen through the window, that one of those thick fogs which have a habit of dropping over New York Harbor so suddenly had enveloped them, and made navigation dangerous.

A big ocean steamer was coming into harbor, and the ferry-boat narrowly escaped running clear across her bows.

The young lady in the thick veil betrayed some concern at the delay, and lifted one corner of the veil to look through the window.

"Blanche!" exclaimed the young man by her side, as he put his hand on her wrist.

The girl dropped her veil, and shook off his hand with an impatient movement, that betrayed her vexation at having discovered herself.

"Blanche!" he repeated.

The laboring man with the whitewash on his clothes half-turned.

"What do you want?" asked the girl.

"Blanche Rogers, where are you going?" from the young man, in a wheezy whisper.

The laboring man was listening intently.

"Ezra Piper, I have told you that I don't wish you to trouble yourself about my affairs."

The girl got up and seated herself by the side of Dennis Carrigan, who politely made room for her.

"Begorra, but the gal has the good taste," he thought.

Piper—for of course it was he—was about to get up, with the evident intention of following her, when a powerful hand grasped his wrist, and a voice, that he did not recognize, hissed in his ear:

"Sit still!"

The laboring man was holding him in a vise-like grip.

Piper struggled silently to release his hand, but the laboring man had fingers like steel, and he could not get away.

"Let go my hand!" he growled, under his breath.

"Sit still!"

"If you don't take your hand off me, I'll cut your fingers off."

"Sit still."

"Who are you?"

"Sit still."

Piper's left hand disappeared in his ulster, and in a second came out again with a dirk-knife. The laboring man snatched it from him, and put it in his own pocket. Then, with a contemptuous smile, took it out and returned it to Piper.

"Sit still!"

Piper made an effort to leave his seat, but a wrench at his wrist, given apparently without any effort on the part of the laboring man, brought him to his seat again.

The struggle and conversation had been conducted so quietly that the other passengers, with the exception of the young lady—who was, of course, Blanche Rogers—had not noticed it at all.

"What do you mean by interfering with me?" wheezed Piper.

"What do you mean by forcing your attentions on that young lady?"

"She is a friend of mine."

"Indeed? She does not act like a friend," with a contemptuous smile.

The boat was still groaning and palpitating in the thick fog, but without making any progress.

The laboring man released the other's wrist and arose from his seat. Then he bent over and whispered a few words in Piper's ear.

"Why—why—what—" stammered Piper.

But the laboring man was gone.

The girl had been watching the quiet controversy between the laboring man and Piper and had never taken her eyes from them.

When Piper recovered from his astonishment at the rapid disappearance of the laboring man, he looked across the cabin to see what Blanche was doing.

He could hardly believe his eyes. She, too, had vanished.

Piper crossed over to her vacant seat, and addressing himself to Dennis Carrigan, who was sleepily nodding and catching himself, asked:

"Where is that young lady who was sitting by the side of you a moment ago?"

Dennis opened his eyes very wide and looked his questioner up and down.

"Sorra the wan o' me knows. An' I wouldn't tell you if I did. So put that in yer poipe an' shmove it."

Piper looked savagely at the other, and the tightening of his thin lips indicated that he would like to have visited bodily chastisement upon the Irishman, had he dared. He contented himself with a scowl and marched out of the cabin forward.

The fog was so thick that he could not see more than a yard or two when he reached the deck outside. The yellow mist seemed to crawl into his very bones, and he sunk his chin deep into his ulster and shivered.

The whistles and bells were in full action, sounding weird and awful in the impenetrable obscurity. The boat was not moving.

Piper walked forward until he reached the safety-gates.

Where was Blanche? He had no doubt that she had come out here to escape his attentions, but she could not be far away.

Even as he thought thus, a slight cough almost at his elbow fell upon his ear. The next instant he had his arm around the waist of Blanche Rogers.

"Take your arm away, sir. What do you mean by annoying me in this way?"

"Blanche, I want to know why you are throwing me over in this way."

"I do not want to speak to you, sir. If you do not leave me, I will scream."

"Scream! Do! It will be interesting and dramatic, and won't do you any good. The officers of the boat are too busy trying to get through this fog to trouble themselves about girls' screams, and, as for the passengers they could never find me or you either if I chose to keep you out of their way."

"You are a coward, Ezra Piper, to insult a defenseless girl in this way."

"You are a fool, Blanche Rogers, to be crossing the North River on such a morning as this when your home is 'way up-town,'" replied Piper, rudely, as he gave the girl a rough shake.

"Why, you murtherin' villain, take that."

Dennis Carrigan's right fist struck Piper un-

der the chin, and he reeled backward against the gunwale with a crash that jarred him from head to foot.

"That's what we used to d'ale out to the bhoys, in ould Tipperary, do you moind," yelled Dennis, as he skinned about, ready to renew the combat, his long ulster flying open and actually displacing the fog in his vicinity.

Piper was a second or two before he recovered his scattered wits. Then, with that sneaking movement of his hand to the inside of his ulster, he flew at the Irishman.

"Oh, howly saints! Oi'm cut. Sure I'm kilt entoirely," cried Dennis, as he grasped his assailant under the arms, and whirled him around like a kitten.

"Curse you! Let me go!" wheezed Piper, as he tried to use his dirk knife again.

"Quit yer foolin', you shpaldeen. You've nearly cut the arm off me. But for me ulster I'd be dead!"

Ezra managed to get his right hand free, and the knife flashed dangerously near Dennis's throat.

"Take that, you Irish hound!" hissed the tenor, as he tried to bury his knife in the other's neck.

"Well, indade, thin, Oi'm not takin' onything from you. But you just git!"

With a superhuman effort, the Irishman lifted the other from his feet, swung him around in the air, and threw him clear over the side of the boat into the boiling sea.

A scream of horror from Blanche, and then a laboring man, with spots of whitewash on his clothing and on his long, dark mustache, sprung forward, and thrusting Dennis aside, jumped into the water and struck out for the drowning man.

CHAPTER VI.

PIPER PLAYING A LONE HAND.

"MAN overboard!"

A deck-hand had seen the splash as Ezra Piper dropped into the water, and a moment later the plunge of the laboring man.

Ropes and life-preservers were thrown over, and directly the laboring man was seen clinging to one, while with his left hand he held the hair of Piper in a tight grip, thus keeping his head above water.

Ezra, incumbered by his heavy ulster, could hardly have saved himself, even had he been a good swimmer, which he was not. His rescuer, on the other hand, had thrown off his overcoat, and in a complete suit of blue overalls, seemed to be quite at home in the water.

"Catch hold of this," he whispered to Ezra, pushing the life-preserved toward him.

Piper, hardly knowing what he did, benumbed with the cold, and half choked with water, obeyed mechanically. There was a line attached to the preserver, and with a "Yo-heave-ho!" he was dragged to the deck of the boat, and hustled away to the engine-room to be dried and warmed.

Almost as soon as Piper had been dragged aboard, the laboring man, assisted by a dozen willing hands, had leaped to the deck and was also hustled toward the engine-room.

Piper had been taken to one corner, where he was temporarily rigged out in some old clothes of one of the firemen, while the laboring man was similarly accommodated in another part of the room.

Neither of the involuntary bathers could see the other. It was perhaps as well that this was so, for the appearance of both had so materially changed as the result of their ducking that there would undoubtedly have been an awkward recognition had the two men found themselves face to face.

The heavy mustache of the laboring man had been washed off, showing the features of "Git Thar Thar" Owney. As for Piper, his mustache was gone, the rouge had been rubbed off his face, and his flabby cheeks looked baggier than ever as he shivered and cowered with the cold, that seemed as if it would not be expelled from his system.

It is useless to say that the detective had known Piper from the first, though the recognition had not been mutual.

The heat of the boilers was soon sufficient to dry the clothes of the two men, and by the time the ferry-boat had worked its way to Jersey City, the two men were once more arrayed in their own clothes.

Piper sneaked out of the engine-room as soon as he was dressed, and made his way into the ladies' cabin.

The fog had lifted a little, and it did not take him long to satisfy himself that neither Blanche Rogers nor the Irishman were in the cabin. He

walked forward, and as soon as the boat reached the slip, leaped ashore and disappeared.

He did not go into the street, but turning to the right, walked with a crowd of hurrying people into the waiting-room of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

He took a seat in a corner where he could watch everything that took place, without being conspicuous himself.

He had lost his mustache and cheek-pads, and stood confessed as the Ezra Piper whom we first met on the stage of the Euterbia Theater.

For perhaps five minutes he sat in his corner, looking furtively about him. Then he arose and walked briskly across to the restaurant that adjoins the waiting-room.

The colored waiters were busy serving breakfast to the passengers of incoming and outgoing trains, and the cheerful clatter of knives, forks and plates resounded through the room unceasingly.

Piper seated himself at the counter, and, having ordered hot rolls and coffee, leisurely ate and drank, while watching everybody and everything around him.

He had just finished his meal, when a voice whispered in his ear, "Come."

Without turning his head, Piper got off his stool, paid for his meal, and strolled carelessly out of the restaurant and into the street.

He turned into a street to the left of the depot, whose houses faced the river, and from the windows of which one could look straight at the deck of the Cunard steamer that lay in her dock with her bowsprit almost overhanging the street.

Into this particular house Piper walked with an air of proprietorship—the door being unfastened—and marching straight up-stairs, unlocked the door of a bedroom.

As he opened the door and stepped inside the room, he found himself in the company of Norman Roundel.

Shutting the door and bolting it inside, the latter placed his back against it, and looking inquiringly at Piper, said:

"Well?"

"Nothing!" was Piper's enigmatical response.

"Why?"

"Slipped away from me, that's all," answered Ezra sulkily. "Dumped me into the river, too."

"So I heard," said Roundel carelessly.

"Oh, you did? Well, it doesn't seem to trouble you much."

"Not much," assented Roundel. "But we must do something about that fellow, Owney. You don't happen to know that he was on the boat, and that he was shadowing you, and me, too, for all I know."

"Wha-a-at?"

Piper fairly shrieked.

Roundel sat on the side of the bed and smiled.

"Ha! You think you are a pretty smart fellow in your line, I don't doubt!" he sneered, "but you have something to learn yet."

"But—but—" stammered Piper.

Roundel lighted a cigarette and allowed the blue smoke to curl from his nose with that air of enjoyment always affected by cigarette smokers.

"Are the people in the house here of a prying disposition?" he asked, after a pause.

"No. This is a regular boarding-house, and as long as the board is paid, and boarders look decent and behave respectfully, there is no particular inquiry made into their private affairs. I am an opera singer, engaged at the Euterbia Theater, you know."

"Exactly."

The two worthies grinned at each other significantly.

"Now," went on Roundel; "as I happen to know that Git Thar Owney is shadowing us, I think the best thing we can do is to lie down here and get a few hours' sleep. If we move around on the street or go up to the crib, we shall be pretty sure to have him with us. He's off the scent now, I know. I had him following me about the depot, until I saw a good chance to slip through the baggage-room and leave him. The last I saw of him, he was dodging about the other side of the waiting-room like a cat in a strange garret while I was keeping you company through the wagon-gate to the street."

The speaker chuckled, and Piper joined him with great enjoyment.

"Did you see Blanche on the boat?" asked Ezra.

Roundel looked at him curiously.

"I am afraid," he said coldly, "that you are losing whatever business sense you have had, on account of that girl. Yes, I did see her, and I saw you making a fool of yourself, and spoiling

our whole 'lay' on her account. If the girl wants to come over to Jersey City at eight o'clock in the morning, it is none of your business, nor of mine either."

"You don't think—"

"That she is shadowing us? No, I certainly do not," was the sarcastic reply. "What does she know about our business? I'm afraid your brain is getting softer than ever. Perhaps your bath this morning soaked all the sense out of it."

"Or froze it out. It was pretty cold, I tell you."

"Undoubtedly. Well, now lie down."

Without another word, Norman Roundel threw himself upon the bed, and turning his face to the wall, seemed to be asleep directly.

The flabby-faced tenor, leaning against the manne, stood looking at him vacantly, with an expression that told as plainly as words, that his thoughts were elsewhere. For at least fifteen minutes he stood in a brown study.

Then with a start he came to himself, and, glancing once more at Roundel to satisfy himself that he was sound asleep, he noiselessly opened the door, and slipping quietly down the stairs, made his way to the street.

There was no fog now, and the clear air was slightly warmed by the winter sun that now shone in all its splendor, and made the dingy old city look almost cheerful.

Piper walked swiftly, with an unhesitating step, as of one who knew his way, until he reached a quiet street in the upper part of the city, where a row of frame houses, each in its own small garden, betokened that they were the residences of well-to-do mechanics, or storekeepers in a small way of business.

A knock at the door brought a bright-looking servant-girl.

"Mr. Roundel in?" asked Piper.

"No, sir."

"How long will he be?"

"I don't know. He went out early this morning, before I was awake. He often does so! He does not sleep well, and he goes out for a long walk to freshen himself up."

"Hum! I'll wait for him. He expects me. Can you let me wait in his library?"

The girl, an innocent, unsophisticated, country damsel, yet hesitated a moment, for Ezra Piper's appearance was not very prepossessing. He pushed past her, however, and almost before she knew what had happened, he was sitting in an easy chair before a cozy fire, in the front parlor that he had referred to as the library.

He evidently knew the house as well as the owner himself, for he had not sat more than a few minutes before he suddenly arose, and, with a careless glance out of the window, went to the cupboard below the bookcase, and opened it by touching a secret spring.

"Ah, there they are. Beauties, too!"

He took from the cupboard a steel saw, a small crowbar, and a complicated mass of shining steel, which soon showed itself to be a chisel, worked by a lever that could be applied by a slight pressure of the thumb, the whole apparatus being hinged so that it would fold up into a marvelously small space.

A full set of burglar's tools!

Piper examined each one carefully, and then closing the door, resumed his seat in the easy-chair. He was thinking, thinking!

He looked at his watch. It had stopped at half-past seven, the time when he fell into the water. A small clock on the mantel-piece showed that it was now half-past eight.

"Time he should be here. If Roundel will only be kind enough to stay where he is for an hour or two, I think I can arrange this business. He's safe enough, I guess. With all his smartness he is no match for Ezra Piper. He took one drink from my bands, and that was enough. He will sleep as long as I want him to do so. Hallo, there he is, by Jupiter!"

There was a ring at the front door.

He opened the door of the parlor, and intercepting the servant, who was on her way to the front door, directed her to show the gentleman into the parlor.

"Mr. Roundel is not here, but I can transact the business with this gentleman. We were to meet him together. Hurry!"

Before the girl could collect her scattered wits, Piper had pushed her toward the door, and had retreated himself to the library.

The girl opened the door, and saw a tall, dignified gentleman, with gray hair and whiskers.

"I had an appointment with the gentleman that lives here for this morning," said the stranger.

"Who do you mean, Mr. —?"

"I don't know his name," interrupted the elderly gentleman, testily, "but I want to see him. He expects me."

"Show the gentleman into the library, Mary. Show him in," interposed a wheezy voice from the library, and the stranger, pushing past the girl, entered the room and closed the door with a bang.

He found himself face to face with an apparently decrepit old man, with long, flowing white beard, and wearing a black skull-cap on his white hair. He was habited in a voluminous white flannel dressing-gown, and supported himself on a thick walking-cane.

"Mr. Argent!" wheezed the old man, motioning his visitor to the easy-chair, while he took another with his back to the light.

"That is my name—yes," was the impatient response. "Now, what can you tell me about my daughter?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BANKER'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

THE white-haired old man in the white flannel dressing-gown, whom it is quite unnecessary to introduce as Ezra Piper, sat for perhaps half a minute looking into the face of his visitor before he answered.

Then he slowly stroked his long, white beard, and coughed violently, all the while watching every movement in the countenance of the impatient gentleman before him.

"What's the matter with the man?" burst from Mr. Argent. "Why don't you answer me? This is the address you sent me. (I suppose it was you that sent it.) You are the man I am to see, and you told me you could give me information of my daughter—for a consideration."

"Yes."

"What do you know about her?"

The question came so sharply that Piper fairly started.

"Before I answer that question I must request a fee."

"Of course. Extortion! That is the way of the world," said the banker.

Piper did not answer, but his small eyes twinkled watchfully under the bushy white eyebrows.

"How much do you want?"

"A hundred dollars."

"A hundred devils!" burst out Mr. Argent. "Why, you infernal old blackmailer, I'll—"

He sprung half-way from his chair in a threatening manner, but recovering himself at once, sunk back again.

"Well, why not?" he muttered. "I can easily put the police on the job if he tries to cheat me." Then aloud, as he took out a well-filled pocketbook, and handed the old man five twenty dollar bills:

"Here is your money. Now, for your information. You seem to know all about the circumstances surrounding my daughter's disappearance."

"I do," was the quiet response of Piper as he eagerly clutched the money and hid it somewhere in the folds of his dressing-gown.

Perhaps if the banker could have seen that the right hand of the venerable-looking old man held a long dirk-knife with a grasp so tight that his knuckles were white with the strain, he would have hesitated before addressing his companion in such forcible language as he had used.

Piper walked to the door and fastened it, the banker following him with his eyes.

"Now, sir, if you will follow me to this corner I will try and give you the information you seek," wheezed Piper, pointing to a small table on which was something covered with a cloth.

The banker, with a mystified expression, in which there was traceable a slight element of disdain obeyed the other's directions, taking his stand in front of the table.

Suddenly the room was in pitch darkness. The window had been obscured by a heavy shutter that excluded every ray of daylight, and had yet been moved almost noiselessly at one touch of the old man's hand.

"What does this mean?" demanded the banker, sternly.

"Hush! Do not disturb the occult influences that are about to work," replied Ezra, in an affected voice of deep solemnity.

"Occult fiddlesticks! Open that shutter, or I'll have you arrested before you are five minutes older. Do you think you can humbug me?" returned Mr. Argent, angrily.

He could not see whereabouts the old man was, but that instinct which no one can explain told him that his companion was very near to him. His supposition was confirmed when he heard a

hollow voice just in front of him command him to look downward.

He did as he was told and then started back in astonishment, while a chilly feeling of preternatural horror ran down his back.

His hands dropped and rested upon the edge of the table, while right between them he saw a disk of metal or liquid—he could not tell which—lighted up by a phosphorescent blaze that was yet quite clear and transparent.

"Look fixedly into the bowl and see what science has to reveal," broke forth the hollow tones of Ezra Piper.

The banker, scarce knowing what he did, gazed at the disk until his eyes seemed to burn.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated.

The disk, which had been clear as crystal, had become cloudy, as if sediment had been stirred up in a bowl of muddy water. The clouds moved hither and thither and assumed fantastic shapes that at last became concentrated in the center.

"What do you see?" asked the solemn voice of the white-haired old man.

The banker strained his eyes as he intensified his gaze.

"I see," he murmured, "my Lucy—my daughter—my Lucy!"

A noise that might have been a chuckle quickly turned into a cough issued from that part of the room in which stood Ezra Piper, but the banker did not notice it. He was completely absorbed in the vision that was being revealed to him in the phosphorescent bowl.

The clouds in the center had at last come to a standstill and showed the face of a young girl, which the banker recognized at once as that of his daughter.

For a moment he looked yearningly at it. Then, with a wild cry, he reached out to touch it with his hand.

As he did so a cold grasp on his wrist held him like a steel vise, and a voice that he did not recognize hissed:

"Put your hand down!"

At the same instant the clouds spread over the face, and after a few seconds' agitation, disappeared, leaving the disk clear and transparent as before, and still lighted up by the blue glare that came from he knew not whence.

"What jugglery is this?" demanded Mr. Argent, as he vainly strove to release his wrist.

"You shall see directly."

It was the wheezy voice of Piper. No trace of the solemn accents of the venerable old man could be detected in it.

Then the cold hand released the banker's wrist and the mysterious bowl vanished.

"Would you have further information?" asked Piper, in the hollow, grave-yard voice again.

"What can you show me more?"

"I can show you where your daughter is and how to reclaim her."

"Do so, then."

"Three hundred dollars."

"Why, you—you—" spluttered the banker, as he tried in vain to penetrate the thick darkness that surrounded him.

"You were told to bring money with you, were you not?" said the old man, coldly.

"Yes, but—"

"Three hundred dollars."

"Let me have light enough to count it then."

Even as he spoke, the shutters fell from the windows, and the winter sunlight streaming in, showed him the white-haired old man standing on the opposite side of the table, upon which the mysterious something covered with a cloth was the only suggestion of the vision he had just seen.

The small eyes of Piper were scanning him closely.

The banker drew forth his pocketbook and took out three hundred dollars in bills, which he handed to Ezra Piper.

The latter's fingers were just closing over the money, when there was a sudden crash, the shutters flew up, and in the total darkness Piper received a mighty blow in the chest that stretched him at full length upon the floor, while a voice hissed savagely in his ear:

"You cur!"

The banker stood petrified. He could not see anything in the profound darkness, and the irruption of another person into the room apparently from thin air was enough to startle any ordinary human being.

With the sound of Piper's fall and the two words of indignation there was a dead silence for several seconds.

Then there was a slight bustle, a whispering of which he could not distinguish the purport, and his two wrists were seized—one by a hot,

dry hand, and the other by a clammy, cold one. The latter he at once recognized as that which had held him before, and knew it to be that of the amiable old gentleman with the long white hair and beard. The other he rightly conjectured to be that of the stranger who had disturbed the *seance* so rudely, and who had stigmatized the sage as a "cur."

"What—"

Mr. Argent would have added, "does this mean?" but no sooner was the first word of the sentence out of his mouth than a wooden gag was forced between his teeth, and a cord that held it was tightly tied around his head, cutting his cheek and causing him excruciating pain. This was relieved almost directly, however, his captors evidently not desiring to hurt him unnecessarily.

Silently he was dragged forward. He had not been moved from the position he had all along occupied in front of the table, and it seemed to him that he was being taken directly through the wall of the room opposite the window.

A draught of cold air struck him, and he knew that he was being taken through a door that he had not observed while the room was light.

A dozen steps further, and then a gruff voice whispered:

"We are going down-stairs."

Instinctively the banker put forth his foot cautiously, and found that he was at the head of a flight of stairs.

He counted them as he descended, still held on both sides. Ten steep stairs of stone or brick.

Still pitch dark. He was evidently in a cellar.

As he settled this in his mind, a handkerchief was passed around his eyes and a heavy sack or covering of some kind put over his head.

Then he heard another door open and through the thick sack on his face he detected a faint odor of horses.

He was dragged swiftly along until he felt a still colder current of air on his hands, which were the only part of his body exposed. He knew that he was no longer in a house, but whether he was on a street or only in a back yard he could not tell. There was no noise, save the occasional impatient pawing of horses' hoofs.

Again warmth and a stronger smell of horses. Then the sack and bandage were removed from his face and the gag from his mouth, and he found himself in a stable lighted by two windows high up in the walls.

He looked quickly to see what his captors were like.

He saw a tall, dark man, with white hair and a small, sneaking-looking fellow, with whiskers, mustache and a flabby face.

Norman Roundel and Ezra Piper.

"Where is the old man?" gasped the banker, in astonishment.

"He's at home. What do you want with him?" asked Roundel, gruffly.

"My—my—daughter."

"We are taking you to her."

"You villains! You lie! I'll hand you over to the police as soon as I get away from you. I'll—"

"Exactly!" sneered Roundel. "As soon as you get away! I'm glad you put that in. Here, beauty, shove him into the coupe."

The last command was addressed to Piper who stood grinning at the other side of the banker, but without relaxing his hold of the prisoner's right wrist, Roundel's clutch being on the other one.

With a dexterous movement, Roundel jumped behind the banker, and locking his arms around him, held him securely so that Piper could let him go.

There were two horses in the stable. They turned toward Piper as he went to their heads. They evidently knew him.

In five minutes he had them harnessed to a close carriage of rather remarkable appearance, such as might belong to a family of reduced gentility.

The banker stood watching Piper's proceedings in silence. The gag had been replaced in his mouth and he could not utter even a whimper, had he desired to do so.

"Ready?" asked Roundel, at last.

"Yes."

"Open the door."

"All right."

The door of the carriage was opened, and Mr. Argent was bundled in, the white-haired scoundrel following him, and closing the door and curtains.

Piper mounted to the driver's seat, and the door of the stable opening and closing automatically, drove rapidly out toward the suburbs.

The stable was in a quiet alley, and there were no inquisitive idlers to note their departure.

But scarcely had they turned into the street that led directly toward the Jersey meadows when a lithe, active figure sprung upon the back of the carriage, and rode, unknown to the driver or to the occupants of the vehicle, with a supreme disregard of the discomforts of his perch among the spikes.

It is possible that he was going to work somewhere in the country, for he was dressed in rough working-clothes, and had splashes of whitewash all over him.

He was none other than the man who had rescued Ezra Piper from a watery grave in the North River, and who is not entirely unknown to the reader as Git Thar Owney.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD WOMAN IN THE WHITE NIGHT-CAP.

WHEN Dennis Carrigan so effectually ended his fight with Ezra Piper by throwing him overboard he was for the moment stunned by what he had done.

Then he saw the laboring man with the whitewash on his mustache leap after the tenor, and rescue him with apparently little effort.

"The shpalpeen!" commented Dennis, "he couldn't be drownded, in coorse. I might ha' knowned that, so I might."

With this philosophical reflection he watched the two dripping figures dragged on board and taken to the engine-room. Then, finding that no one seemed to trouble themselves about him, he sauntered to the front of the boat in the fog, and waited until the ferry slip in Jersey City should be reached.

He looked as well as he could in the fog to see what had become of the young lady who had been the cause of all the excitement, but she was nowhere in his vicinity.

"Faith! What does it matter to me? She's a purty gurrl, I guess, but it's none o' my business where she's gone," he reflected, as he stepped briskly off the boat.

He had hardly reached the street when he felt a light touch on his arm, and turning sharply, found the young lady at his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, but I am almost a stranger in Jersey City," said a sweet voice that somehow did not sound altogether unfamiliar to Dennis.

"Indade, then, I pity ye, for Jersey is a noice place to kim ter, whin you are sort o' tired o' the foon an' divarshun uv Noo Yorrk."

"Yes, yes, ' hastily, "but I want to find a little street called Hackensack Place."

"Well, now, be the powers, that's a big joke."

"Joke?"

"Yis, for sure don't I live there meself."

"You?"

"Yis, none other."

"Then perhaps you know the person I am looking for."

"Devil doubt—I beg your pardon! I m'an yis, very loikely."

"His name is Dennis Carrigan."

"What? An' is it Dennis ye be lookin' fur? Well, hurroo! If this ain't a picnic. Why, I'm that same mon!"

The two were walking along as they talked, but the girl stopped suddenly as Dennis made this announcement, and lifting her veil, showed the pretty face of Blanche Rogers to the astonished Irishman.

"Well, be the powers, who'd ha' thought it? Miss Lucy! Why, your pa's been a-hunting for you everywhere, an'—an'—"

"Why, how is it that you know me? I do not think I have ever met you before."

"Och! Bliss the purty facu uv ye. An' d'ye think a mon would ever forgit ye when he'd once seen ye? Haven't ye been down to the bank beyant, an' havn't I seen ye from me own little office whin ye did not think I was ob-sarvin' ye? Sure, I know ye, Miss Lucy Argent, right well."

"Well, Mr. Carrigan, I want you to help me. I was going to your house. Is it far from here?"

"Jist a small bit of a walk, that's all."

"Then let us go there, so that I can talk to you quietly."

"Sure, an' won't our small house be honored by yer prisence? Come on."

The girl dropped her veil and walked swiftly by the side of her good-natured companion, who strode along with a swelling bosom, and a half-defined wish that some one would offer to injure

the young girl that he might have the satisfaction of laying another of her enemies low.

A narrow court in a rather thickly populated part of the city was reached at last, and Dennis announced it as Hackensack Place.

In another moment the two were in a small kitchen, with a cot-bed in one corner. A fire was burning in a little kitchen stove, and there was a general atmosphere of coziness that was delightful after the chilly ride across the river in the fog.

Dennis bustled about, talking all the while. He explained that he was his own housekeeper, but that the landlady always lighted his fire, so that his room would be warm when he came home from the bank in the morning.

Then he made coffee, and bringing out bread and butter, invited the girl to eat and drink.

"An' phat can I do for ye, Miss Lucy?" asked Dennis, when the meal was in full progress.

"My name is Blanche Rogers now, Dennis. Please call me Blanche," corrected the girl.

"Sure, an' I'll call ye anything ye say, an' Blanche is a purty name, though not as enticin' as Lucy, I don't think."

"I'm afraid you've kissed the Blarney Stone some time or other, Dennis."

"Faith, an' if I had I'd niver find toime to say anything else but compliments for ye, Miss Lucy. But tell me phat I can do for ye."

"There is a scheme on foot to rob my father's bank."

"Phwat? Rob the bank? Where are the dhrity shpalpeens? Show them to me! Bring 'em out."

Dennis arose from the table and danced about the room in excitement.

Blanche held up her hand to cool him down.

"Now, Dennis, we must lay some other plan to catch these thieves. I have already thought of something."

"Sure you're as shmart as ye're purty. Phat is it now?"

"You shall see. But, in the first place, can you tell me what became of the man who jumped into the river after that sneaking fellow you knocked off the ferry-boat. I looked for him afterward, but he got off the boat before I could speak to him."

"You knew him, then?"

"I knew who he was," was the girl's guarded answer.

"Well, be the powers, I was so much shuck up that I didn't see anybody, though I believe I'd know both those fellers if I see'd 'em ag'in, d'ye moind?"

"Are you too tired to take a walk with me?"

Dennis did not reply in words, but putting on his ulster and cap, he buttoned himself up, and waited while the girl put on her own hat and cloak.

In another minute they were on the street, and walking briskly up-town.

They had reached a rather unfrequented street, and the girl was looking about her as if doubtful which way to go, when suddenly a crushing blow descended on the head of Dennis, knocking him senseless, while at the same time a heavy cloak was thrown over Blanche's head, and she felt herself dragged into a house, and heard the door shut with a bang.

Before she could recover herself, she was hurried up a flight of stairs, and into a room, the door of which was closed and double-locked.

She tore the covering from her face and looked around. She was in a small, meanly-furnished bedroom without a window, the only light that reached the apartment coming from a small opening in the wall, that looked upon a small hall in the interior of the house. There was evidently a window in the hall, by which light was given, second-hand, to the room, but Blanche could not see it. In fact, she could not look through the opening at all, for it was very near the ceiling.

She wrapped her cloak around her, and shivered.

Who had so boldly attacked her in the broad, open daylight, on the outskirts of a big city? She could not tell certainly, but she had a very shrewd idea as to the identity of her captors.

She had not long to wait before her suspicions were confirmed.

The door opened and two men entered.

"Good-morning, Miss Blanche!"

It was the wheezing voice of Ezra Piper.

"What does this mean?" demanded the girl, indignantly.

"It means that we desire the pleasure of your society for a few hours, that's all."

"You wretch!"

Here the other man, whose distinguishing features were snow-white hair, and a heavy, sturdy frame, joined in:

"Keep quiet and you will not be injured. I am afraid that you will not be able to get to the theater to-night, but they will get along somehow without you; I have no doubt."

"Norman Roundel, I know your real character, and you shall suffer for this."

"Of course; I am suffering now. This is a suffering world," sneered Roundel. "But I must bear it. I guess you will need a fire up here. It is rather cold. I'll send a woman up to light a fire. Come, Ezra."

Piper looked at Blanche for a moment, and when Roundel's back was turned momentarily, made a deprecatory sign, as if to assure the girl that he was acting against his will, and would assist her if it were in his power.

Blanche tossed her head contemptuously and turned away. She knew Piper too well to place any trust in his protestations.

The two men disappeared, and the door was again carefully fastened on the outside.

"They know that I have found out their intentions, and that I was trying to entrap them," mused the girl. "What a triumph it would have been for me if I had been successful! My poor father! I know he feels grieved over my behavior in running away, and if I could have caught those wicked men in the very act, and made him confess that his little girl had saved the bank, he would have forgiven me for my waywardness."

She walked up and down the room half a dozen times in extreme agitation, as she resumed the thread of her reflections:

"Heigbo! I don't like being away from home! There was a little pleasure in the sense of liberty at first, but I should like to be in my own comfortable home with my dear father, once more. I don't think I shall be quite as obstinate and self-willed when I get back again. This has taught me a lesson."

Lucy Argent (or Blanche Rogers, as we shall continue to call her), was not really afraid for herself. She was too near New York, with its splendid police system, she told herself, to be in much personal peril, but it was important, for the sake of the bank, that she should regain her freedom now.

"I must and will get out of here somehow," she muttered, grinding her pretty white teeth, as she took a small silver-mounted revolver from her dress and examined it critically.

"Fortunately for myself, I know how to use a pistol, as perhaps Mr. Piper and Mr. Roundel may discover to their discomfort before they are much older."

A slight noise at the door caused her to return the weapon hastily to her pocket.

An old woman in a large flapping white nightcap opened the door and stepped into the room. In her hand she carried a bucket containing kindling-wood, paper and coal.

Without a word, the old woman walked across the room, and kneeling down in front of the rusty grate, soon had a cheery fire under way.

With a beating heart, Blanche saw that the old woman had forgotten to close the door. There was a space of perhaps six inches, through which the girl looked out into the gloomy hall beyond.

If she could get through the doorway without being observed by the old woman, perhaps she might yet find some means of defeating the schemes of her enemies.

It was worth trying!

Grasping her revolver, she crept cautiously toward the door, with her eye fixed on the old woman, who, kneeling before the grate, was blowing the fire.

The girl had hardly made up her mind what to do in case the old woman should turn around, but in a vague sort of way expected to shoot her and then make a dash for liberty.

Nearer and nearer to the door, and still the old woman blew the now lively blaze in the grate.

Two more steps, and the girl would have her hand on the door.

She took one step, and had her hand extended to pull the door open, when—the old woman arose to her feet and sprung toward her.

Blanche tried to raise her revolver and fire, but the weapon caught in her dress. Before she could disentangle it, the old woman was upon her and had grasped her wrists.

"Don't fire, for your life!" she whispered.

Blanche started, and her eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"Don't you know me?" asked the old woman, eagerly, below her breath.

"What? Surely not?" hesitated the girl. For answer the old woman threw back her flapping night-cap, and placing her back against the door, shut and locked it.

"Yes, it is! Thank Heaven!" cried Blanche, as her eyes filled with tears of joy. "Git Thar' Owney!"

CHAPTER IX.

A TEST FOR BLANCHE'S NERVE.

As Blanche uttered his name "Git Thar" Owney looked cautiously around, and put his finger warningly to his lips.

"Hush! Don't mention my name again. The walls have ears here."

"But you will help me?"

"That is what I am here for."

"How did you know anything about my being here, and how did you get here yourself?"

"That is too long a story to tell now. We have work to do."

"Git Thar" Owney replaced his white night-cap so that the flaps should cover his face even more than before, and stooping over, hobbled about the room after the manner of a very aged woman.

None too soon! The door shook violently and the voice of Roundel demanded that it should be opened.

"Open the door, old woman. Do you hear?"

"I'm deaf as a post," whispered Owney, with a smile, "but I'll open the door before he makes any more trouble. He'll break the door down the first thing we know."

Indeed, Roundel was kicking and thumping with all his might, making the thick panels tremble and split under his assaults.

"Open the door!"

Another tremendous kick, and Owney turned the key and pulled the door open suddenly.

"Halloa! Do you want to come in?" croaked Owney.

"Do I want to come in? Didn't you hear me kicking, you old fool?"

"Eh?"

"Git out of my way," growled Roundel, as he gave the supposed old woman an impatient shove, and strode into the room.

Owney stood near the door, with his face hidden behind the flaps of his nightcap, apparently waiting for Roundel to go out.

"What are you waiting there for?" howled the latter, at the top of his voice.

"Eh?"

The old woman was particularly deaf this morning, and Roundel, with an uncertain air, as if he did not know whether to throw her out or not, made up his mind not to trouble about her, as he muttered:

"Makes no difference! She can't hear anything I say."

Blanche was standing near the fire, looking contemptuously at her captor.

"At least you might allow me the poor comfort of privacy while you are keeping me here against my will," she said, icily.

"So I will when I have said what I have to say."

"Speak quickly and leave me alone."

"I will. The fact of the matter is this—"

He stopped. The old woman had drawn very close to him, and while standing with her face away, might have been eagerly listening to his words, judging from her intent attitude.

"You old beldam, get out!"

As Roundel thus addressed the unconscious old woman, he seized her by the back of the neck and threw her violently toward the half-open doorway.

She fell in a heap just inside the room, and set up a series of croaks that would have been shrieks but for their feebleness.

"Git Thar" Owney was a good actor, and he could impersonate a decrepit old woman to the life.

"Ow! Ow! Sure Oi'm kilt intarely!" he squeaked. "Ow! You murtherin' villain! Ow! Ow!"

"Curse the old fool! Shut up!"

Roundel made a threatening movement as if he would have kicked the prostrate Owney, but Blanche, seizing him by the arm, exclaimed in indignant tones:

"Are you a man at all, to think of kicking a poor creature old enough to be your grandmother? Shame! Shame!"

Roundel, tossing his head, turned away, and walked toward the fireplace. Could he have seen the grinning face hidden in the nightcap, it is more than likely that he would have bestowed the threatened kick with a hearty good will that would have left Mr. Owney sore for a week.

"Now, what do you want to say to me?" demanded Blanche, looking straight into Roundel's face.

"Your real name is Lucy Argent."

The girl started.

"How do you know?" she asked.

"Never mind. Suffice it that I do know. You have had a quarrel with your father. He has treated you with cruelty—"

"It is a base falsehood," interrupted the girl, with flashing eyes. "He has always been a kind, indulgent father, and—"

"And he loved you so much that he turned you out of the house, to pick up a living in the streets of New York, or to starve, for aught he cared," sneered the other.

The girl did not answer. She was looking into the fire, and a tear glistened in her eye.

Roundel saw it, and drew from it a favorable augury.

"Now, listen," he went on. "I have it on good authority that your father is about to marry again."

"What?"

The girl had turned upon him with a look of horrified dismay.

He continued, coolly:

"The old gentleman is completely infatuated with this lady that he intends to make Mrs. Argent, and she can make him do anything. I happen to know her. My life has been a varied one, and I have been brought into contact with all sorts of people."

"Well?"

"This woman who has gained such control of your father is simply an adventuress, originally from San Francisco. She has somehow found her way into good society, and by means known only to herself has got Mr. Argent not only to propose to her, but to submit himself almost entirely to her dictation in every action of his life."

"What a splendid liar the man is," muttered Git Thar Owney, who, it is needless to say, was listening intently to Roundel's words.

Roundel turned sharply. His hearing was wonderfully acute. But when he saw the old woman standing at the doorway, looking into the hall as if to see that no one stole up unawares, he was satisfied that the muttering he had heard was nothing more than the querulous grumbling of age.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Blanche.

"Your father has promised this woman to take from the bank safe to-night a heavy sum of money—\$30,000—which he will place in her hands, to enable her to invest it in a speculation that she promises shall yield him rich returns. As you know, he cannot raise as much money as that personally just now."

"Well?"

"He has every confidence in this woman, who he believes to be the soul of honor, and whom he intends very shortly to marry. Of course, when she gets the money, she will disappear, and your father will find out, when too late, that he has been a miserable dupe."

"Well?"

"Certain friends of your father's—true friends—are trying to frustrate this woman's designs, and have persuaded your father to come here."

"Persuaded him?"

"Yes, for his own good."

"And you mean to say that my father is here in this house?"

"Yes."

"A prisoner?"

"By no means. He is the guest of friends."

"Take me to him."

"That is just what I came to propose."

Blanche moved toward the door, but Roundel stepped in front of her.

"Stay. There is something I want you to do when you meet him. Will you promise me to do it?"

Roundel's back was toward Owney, who was looking earnestly into the girl's face.

She was about to refuse indignantly, to give her promise, but Owney motioned to her to say yes, and she calmly answered:

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Simply this. Go to your father, in this house, now, tell him that you have just heard where he is. That the person in whom he puts the greatest trust, has found you and has sent you to him."

"Yes."

"He will of course be glad to see you. Then tell him that this person wants the combination of the bank safe. That it is absolutely necessary, or it would not be asked. As a proof give him this letter, which is written in a hand that

he will think is that of the unscrupulous woman he is about to marry."

As Roundel spoke he took from his pocket an envelope apparently containing a letter. There was no superscription upon it. This envelope he placed in Blanche's hands.

"What is the purpose of all this deception?" asked Blanche, with a mystified expression.

"Just this. When you get the combination of the safe you can open the vault and change the lock. Then he will be unable to open it to-night, and his honor will be saved."

"His honor?"

"Yes. Because if the \$30,000 is stolen he will be unable to replace it, and it will surely be discovered before long. Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"So do I," muttered "Git Thar" Owney under his breath. "What a precious scoundrel the fellow is."

"Take me to my father, and I will do what you say," said Blanche, quietly.

"That's right," was the exultant response of Roundel.

He was going to take her hand, but she shrunk back, with the cold remark:

"There is no occasion for us to shake hands, Norman Roundel. You know that I don't like you and I am not disposed to make any pretense now."

Roundel turned away with a toss of his head.

"As you please. Well, just wait here a few moments while I prepare your father. He does not know that you are here." Then, to Owney, he shouted at the top of his voice, while he pointed to Blanche, "Stay here till I come back."

If he had not been so excited over Blanche's acquiescence, he might have been suspicious of the old woman's sudden recovery of her hearing, for she understood at once what he wanted, without troubling him to repeat his command.

As it was, he simply made a threatening motion in her face, as a hint of what he would do if she failed to take care of the prisoner, and strode away down the dark hall.

Owney shut the door with a bang, and having taken the key from the outside of the door, locked it, so that no one could get into the room without his assistance.

Throwing back his flapping night-cap, he turned toward Blanche, who ran forward and took his hands in a supplicating grasp.

"Now, Miss Argent, be cool, and we will fool these people so badly that they won't know whether they are in Jersey City or Jericho."

"What shall I do?"

"Listen. They will take you into a room below the level of the street—a kitchen. There you will find your father alone—apparently. But every word you say will be overheard. The yarn about the woman going to marry your father is a lie, made out of the whole cloth—not a vestige of truth in it."

"I know that, of course," cried Blanche, with a curl of her beautiful lip.

"Yes. The way they expect to deceive your father is to make him suppose that you are a messenger from me. The message you are to deliver to him and that letter are both so artfully worded that, if he was not on his guard, he might give you the combination of the bank safe, thinking it was for me, and that I wanted to use it in some way in the capture of the thieves. Your father has unlimited confidence in me."

"And I am sure that you deserve it."

"Thank you. But that has nothing to do with the matter. When Roundel comes back, follow him, pretend to do what he asks you, and leave the rest to me. I shall be close enough to you, even if you don't see me."

"I will obey you in everything."

"Good girl," returned Owney with an approving smile. "But look out he's coming back."

"Git Thar" Owney pulled his nightcap over his face again, and unlocked the door.

It was pushed open, knocking the detective behind it, and Norman Roundel appeared.

"Step this way, Miss—Miss—Argent."

Without a word, Blanche obeyed, walking behind her conductor along the dark hall, and down two flights of stairs.

Following them, quietly as a shadow, was the old woman in her white nightcap, behind which the resolute features of "Git Thar" Owney indicated that a critical moment was not far away.

CHAPTER X.

A BLOCK GAME.

INTO the pitchy darkness marched Roundel. He had taken the girl's reluctant hand and was

leading her to the very front of the house, as she supposed, though she could not see.

Owney kept close behind them, until with an oath, Roundel turned and grasping him by the arm, swung him around and sent him staggering against the wall. At the same moment a door opened and shut quickly, and Owney was alone.

"A very affable gentleman that, but I think he will find himself badly fooled if he thinks he can't get away with 'Git Thar' Owney."

As he thus reflected, Owney opened another door and found himself in a cellar, with a boarded wall on one side, through the chinks of which streamed the light of a lamp or candle.

He put his eye to one of these hinks and took a survey of the apartment.

Its only occupant was an individual with a flabby face and weak eyes—Ezra Piper. The little tenor was crouching over a feeble fire in a rusty grate, and was the picture of discontent.

"So, you're there all right, are you? Well, I suppose you are getting the worst of it, as usual. Tiger Jim has a knack of making things comfortable for himself, while his partners do the hard work and get none of the booty."

Ezra moved uneasily and looked around, as he grumbled, in audible tones:

"Where's that cursed old woman, I wonder? Why don't she come and get some coffee ready? I don't see why they've put an old image like that in the ranch, anyhow!"

Owney chuckled.

"There are many things you don't understand Mr. Piper," he muttered, "but you'll find out all about them by-and-by. I think I have both you and Roundel just where I want you."

Keeping his eye still at the chink, he was startled by a knock at the door of the room in which Ezra sat. The latter jumped as he heard it, and then, with a nod, as if he understood what it meant, went to the door and unlocked it without hesitation.

"Get up to the hole there, Ezra," commanded Roundel's voice, as that worthy entered and carefully fastened the door.

"Is he there? Ah!"

Piper uttered a long sigh and pressed his hand to his side over the spot where the heart is popularly supposed to be.

Roundel bestowed an unceremonious rap upon the side of the tenor's head that knocked all the sentimant out of him for the time being.

"Don't be a fool," he gruffly ejaculated, "but attend to business."

Piper's long thin fingers stole toward his sleeve, but Roundel seized him by the collar, and, with a shake such as a bloodhound would give a rat, hissed:

"You little worm, if you ever pulled that dirk of yours on me it would be the last act of your life!"

An evil scowl of impotent rage was Piper's only response.

"Now, get up there," continued Roundel, "and do as I tell you."

A wooden bench ran along the wall opposite that behind which stood "Git Thar" Owney. Mounting this bench, Piper moved a framed picture—a cheap colored print representing a vividly impossible landscape—and revealed three small holes, evidently made for spying purposes. To one of these holes, Ezra put his eye, while Roundel looked through another.

"Um! Now, what shall I do?" muttered Owney. "Ah! What's that?"

He found himself struggling in the embrace of some one who had stepped up behind him, and throwing a powerful pair of arms around his neck, was garroting him in truly professional style.

As we know, "Git Thar" Owney was an athlete, but his present unknown foe seemed to be endowed with the strength of three men. Moreover, he had secured the advantage at the outset, by catching our hero behind, and entirely unaware.

"Let me go," hissed Owney, softly, for he did not wish to disturb the two men in the adjoining room. "Who the deuce are you?"

His antagonist did not answer, nor did he make any sound save a vigorous breathing through his nose, but he retained a hold on Owney that the latter could not shake off, try as he might.

The detective knew that he must try strategy if he was to overcome his mysterious enemy, so he suddenly ceased struggling, and allowed the other to do with him as he would.

The result was that Owney was pulled backward, and tripping over a rope that was stretched across the room, and which he had failed to notice before, fell in a heap on his assailant.

As he came down with considerable force on the latter's chest, a grunt resounded through the place, sounding strangely weird in the darkness, and a voice ejaculated in husky accents, as if the man had very little breath:

"Howly saints. If ye haven't knocked the gag out o' me mouth, thin Oi'm a fish!"

"Git Thar" Owney rolled over like a flash, and clapping his hand over the other's mouth, exclaimed in a low voice:

"Hush! Not another word. Don't you know me? I'm a detective, employed by Mr. Argent—" "Git Thar" Owney. You are Dennis Carrigan."

"Faith—" commenced Dennis, but Owney's hand tightened over his mouth, and he could not get out anything more.

"Dont I tell you not to speak loud? Whisper, and whisper very softly," admonished the detective, sternly.

"An' is it whisper, ye say? Faith, an' Oi will thot!"

Dennis said this below his breath, and was rewarded by Owney telling him that a whisper like that would do no harm.

"Now, tell me," added the detective, "what are you doing here?"

"Sorra a wan o' me knows. They tuk me down in this hole, an' they tied me futs wid ropes so they did, an' they put a gag in the jaw o' me, an' they put handcuffs on me wrists, be the token ye c'u'd see the marks av there was loight enough. But I slipped 'em over me hands, an' I was a-troyin' ter git the gag out o' me mouth, whin you kim in."

"And what did you do then?"

"Faith, I did nothing until I c'u'd see what yez was going ter do yeself. Ye was the last ter kim in, an' I t'ought, mebbe y'e'd be the fu'st to go out. Sure I didn't know ye in that ould night-cap, or I'd ha' introjuced meself afore."

"Lie there a second and keep still," was Owney's whispered response, to this long tirade, delivered in a painfully throaty voice, with such ostentatious expression that it seemed as if Dennis would burst before he finished. "I want to look into the next room."

A momentary glance sufficed to satisfy the detective that Roundel and Piper had not heard or heeded the slight noise made by himself and Dennis, so he came away from the wall and producing the small but powerful bull's-eye lantern that he always carried, and that was so arranged that it would fold up into a small compass for easy concealment, turned the light upon the prostrate Irishman.

"Why, your feet are tied."

"Indade an' they are. Me poor ankles are all benumbed, so they are, an' I'm helpless."

One slash of Owney's knife, and the rope fell away. One end of it was secured to a large staple in the floor in a corner of the room, and it was this rope, held taut by the Irishman pulling it that had caused Owney to trip.

"Are you armed?" he whispered, to the Irishman.

"Faith an' I am that. I have a 'pop' here that'll kill at a mile an' a half, an' it never misses fire," answered Dennis, eagerly. He smelt a shindy coming, and he was anxious, like all his countrymen for any fun with plenty of danger.

"Untie these strings for me. I have got them in a knot, and they are out of my reach in the middle of my back," said Owney.

Dennis could not untie them, so he cut them, and the detective, letting the wrapper fall down, and throwing off the white night-cap, stood revealed as the working man with whitewash on his clothes who had dived into the East River to save Ezra Piper from drowning.

He put his hand into one of his pockets and drew forth the brown mustache with the spot of whitewash upon it, and into another and got the slouch hat. A hasty, but dexterous movement was sufficient to make the mustache stick to his upper lip, and then, fitting the slouch hat upon his head, no one would have suspected for a moment that he could ever have been the old deaf woman who, in the character of the new housekeeper, had thoroughly deceived Roundel and his tool, Ezra Piper.

Keeping his lantern in his hand, the young detective turned the light all around the cellar to make sure that it was untenanted by strangers, and then stole softly into the long dark hall.

There might be other people in the house besides those the reader knows of, for all Owney could tell, and he felt that this was not a time to take chances.

All was quiet.

He directed the light down the hall, and, with one finger on his lip to enjoin caution upon his companion, made his way cautiously toward

the door of the room in which he knew Blanche was with her father.

As he passed the door of the other room he shook his fist at it, and Dennis, pointing his pistol at it, looked inquiringly at his companion, as if asking whether he should blaze away through the door, on the chance of shooting down Roundel and Piper at one lucky shot.

"Git Thar" Owney restrained his ardor by a warning look, and Dennis subsided, though he still held his six-shooter ready for instant use.

He tried the door of the room tenanted by Mr. Argent and his daughter. It was locked.

"Um! Roundel has the key in his pocket, of course," muttered Owney.

"The murtherin' villain!" commented Dennis.

The detective produced a piece of wire, and, turning the light of his lantern upon the key-hole, with one twist of the wire turned the bolt, and the door was open.

Cautiously Owney pushed it wider, and then tried to get the banker's attention.

Mr. Argent was walking up and down the room in an agitated manner, while Blanche followed him with her eyes, and tried to get him to listen to her. They had evidently been talking, and were both in a state of nervous excitement.

Owney knew that the watchers in the next room were watching every movement in the room, and that he could not go forward without being seen.

Strangely enough, neither father or daughter happened to look in the direction of the door for at least five minutes.

"Hist!" whispered Owney, at last, as the banker, turning quickly, caught sight of him and started.

Blanche saw him at the same moment.

"Oh, father," she began, "This is—"

"Silence, for your life," warned the detective.

"Yis, howld yer whist," added Dennis, in a voice that made the walls buzz.

Blanche, quick of comprehension, said no more, and the detective, annoyed that enough had been done already to awaken the suspicions of Roundel and Piper, beckoned to Blanche and the banker to come quickly to the door.

They obeyed, and Owney was just about to take the girl's hand and lead her into the hall, when he found himself seized from behind, and ere he could recover himself, dragged along the hall and thrust into the cellar in which he had found Dennis Carrigan confined.

There was a great noise of shouting and scuffling in the hall, and Dennis's voice was raised in anger with a stronger brogue than usual.

Then there were two reports from pistols, and all was still.

"Git Thar" Owney ground his teeth as he found himself once more in the power of his enemies through no fault of his own.

He was utterly unable to tell what had become of Blanche and Mr. Argent, but had no doubt that they were still fastened in the room from which he had tried to release them.

It was evidently of no use his staying where he was, if he could possibly escape.

Now that Roundel had recognized him as the laboring man who had been on the boat in the morning, he would no doubt suspect him of being other than what he seemed, and he could not hope to maintain his disguise under a close examination.

If he were ever revealed to these fellows as "Git Thar" Owney, the terrible detective, he knew that his existence would be a short one. He could be murdered in this thieves' stronghold, with but little chance of the crime being discovered.

He must get out.

Fortunately, he still had all the appliances and weapons that he was accustomed to carry with him, packed in as small a space as possible, so as to be easily hidden in his clothing.

He drew forth his lantern and turned the light all about the cellar. He had never been in it until he came in half an hour before and found Dennis there, a prisoner.

Ah, a window! Shutters with a thick board, but evidently a window.

The boards had been nailed up securely enough originally, no doubt, but the nails had long since partly rusted out, and it required but little of "Git Thar" Owney's strength to pull them down.

"So much for the shutter," he muttered, as he paused for breath. "A back yard. Just what I expected. And there is the carriage and the stables. Lots of style these f. lows put on!"

But though he had removed the board's, and could look into the yard, it must not be supposed that the detective was free. Four iron bars, rusty, but still strong, were fastened

across the outside of the dirty window, and, for anything Owney could tell, were immovable.

He forced open the window, which swung on hinges toward him, and tried the bars.

To his joy, they were not any more secure than the shutter had been. He wrenched two of the bars out of place, and, losing no more time than was necessary, crawled through the opening.

He had got half-way through, when the muzzles of two revolvers were pushed against his face, while the wheezy voice of Ezra Piper gave utterance to a sarcastic:

"Excuse me."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PURSUER PURSUED.

IT was seven o'clock in the evening of the day on which the events narrated in the last chapter took place.

The doors of the Euterapia Theater had just been opened, and a few straggling individuals, who were afraid of not being in time for the performance, were going in and taking their seats in the parquette, while in the gallery the usual crowd of boys that always rushes in early to secure front seats, was making the theater echo to the noise of heavy shoes jumping wildly over benches, as their owners went almost headlong to the front of the gallery, at the imminent risk of pitching over into the body of the house.

On the stage things presented that gloomy appearance peculiar to the sacred regions behind the curtain an hour before it rises.

Only a few of the performers had arrived, and Peter Graul, who was always the first to arrive, was fussing about, directing changes in the setting of the stage, warning the gas-man to be more particular about turning the lights up or down, as the exigencies of the opera might require, and making a nuisance of himself generally.

"Don't see how it is!" he grumbled, "but ever since the *Mikado* has been played at the Euterapia Theater, I have had trouble to get enough Japanese umbrellas and fans. The same with everything else I want. That new tenor was to have come this morning for rehearsal, and he never showed up. Don't know whether he will sing to-night or not. Now Roundel sends me word that he is sick. What shall I do?"

He went to his dressing-room grumbling, and began removing his street clothing, preparatory to making up as the *Mikado*, but came out almost directly without coat or vest, and with his suspenders dangling behind him.

"Great Caesar! What am I to do? I don't care about Roundel. I have two or three men in the chorus that can play *Pooh-Bah* at a pinch, but the tenor is out of the question. I shall go crazy, yet, over that part of *Nanki-Poo*, I know I shall!"

Poor Graul went back to his dressing-room in a most unenviable frame of mind. He was really nonplussed.

Suddenly he darted out with a wild look of surprised joy in his eye.

"Who is that? Where is he? Where is he? Show him to me! Quick! Quick!" he yelled, as he tumbled over a man who was kneeling down to fasten a small tree to the stage.

The stage-manager got up at once without swearing at the man who had inadvertently upset him. He was too much excited over something he had heard just before to notice a trifling personal mishap.

"Who do you want, sir?"

"Want? Who should I want? Confound it! Where the deuce is he?"

Graul danced about, looking behind scenery, into dark corners, and up at the "flies," in a state of frenzy. He was too excited to know what he was doing.

He bounced behind a pile of rusty-painted clouds, and with a cry of rapture, seized some one by the hand and shook it violently.

"Darn me if I didn't know I heard your voice. Hurry up and dress. Here it is getting on for eight o'clock, and I thought I should have no *Nanki-Poo*. Why didn't you come before?"

The excited stage-manager delivered himself of these observations with such volubility, that the person whom he addressed had no chance to answer, but could only wave his hand in token of acquiescence when requested to dress for the character of *Yum-Yum's* lover.

"You should have come earlier," continued Graul, who, now that he was relieved of his anxiety about the arrival of some one to sing the

tenor part, was inclined to be somewhat dictatorial.

The tenor singer stepped from behind the clouds, and the lights of the stage over his head, technically known as "border lights," showed the face and figure of "Git Thar" Owney.

The young detective looked as cool and collected as usual, and no one would have supposed from his manner and appearance that he had passed through adventures of the most exciting character since he sung in the opera of "The Mikado" on the night before.

"I am sorry that I could not get here earlier, Mr. Graul," he said, when at length the stage-manager's breath failed him for an instant. "But I had some important private matters to attend to. I am in plenty of time for the performance, however. It will not take me long to dress."

"Have you seen Roundel?" asked Graul, ignoring Owney's remarks.

"I—I—"

"You have seen him then," interrupted the other impatiently. "Well, where is he?"

"He will not be here to-night, I am afraid."

"He won't? How do you know? Where is he? The skulking vagabond! I'll make him come. I'll sue him for breach of contract! I'll break every bone in his body. I'll have him sent to the Penitentiary! I'll play his part myself to-night! I'll publish him in the newspapers! I'll make him go on and sing to-night! I'll— I'll—"

But here Peter Graul's voice again failed him and although he tried to continue speaking, he could only give utterance to incoherent sounds that floated among the cordage and lumber of the stage and finally lost itself in the dark space above.

"Git Thar" Owney did not wait for the stage-manager to commence again, but retired to his dressing-room to attire himself for his part in the opera.

Graul looked after him, and then, having made up his mind that it was of no use to waste time in grumbling at the inevitable, went back to his own dressing-room, thankful that his tenor was all right, and that he had a substitute for the erratic Roundel.

In due time the curtain arose and the opera began. There was a goodly-sized audience, and the theater was bright and cheerful.

The cue was given for *Nanki-Poo*, and Owney walked upon the scene, and sung his first song to applause that was even more vigorous than on the preceding night.

As he sung his eyes roved over the auditorium and a half-smile lurked on his lips as his glance rested for a few seconds upon two men who sat in the parquette circle half concealed by a gilded post.

Norman Roundel and Ezra Piper!

At the instant that he saw them, they recognized him through the paint and powder on his face and in spite of his ridiculous theatrical wig.

"You see him?" growled Roundel, under his breath.

"Yes, curse him!" responded Piper.

"It's all very well to curse him. If you had had any pluck he would not have been here to-night."

"But what was I to do? He—"

Roundel cast a contemptuous glance upon the flabby-faced little man, and replied:

"Of course! You couldn't do anything. You never can. I don't know why I ever work with you at all."

Piper could have told him that the reason was because he was useful to the larger and bolder villain, but he did not say so. He only shrugged his shoulders humbly, and Roundel went on:

"When we had him all safe at the crib, you had to let him walk out as comfortably as if he owned us all. Now, he'll put the stop on that job as sure as we are here now."

"Well, I couldn't help it. I did all I could. But he took me all of a sudden, grabbed my pistols, and was gone just when I thought I had him all safe."

"Well, the game's up now."

"Why? He hasn't given us away yet. We've watched him, and we know that he hasn't had a chance to talk to the police, unless he did it in the few minutes we lost sight of him before he got into the theater."

Roundel was about to answer, but he saw that several people near him were looking indignantly at Ezra and himself for disturbing the audience by whispering, and he held his tongue until the drop-curtain fell at the end of the act.

"Let us get out," he whispered then.

Without a word, Piper got up and left the theater, followed by his companion.

At the moment that the two men disappeared, an eye was watching them through a small hole in the curtain. The eye belonged to "Git Thar" Owney.

"Hallo, Flute! What are you looking at out there? Have you made a mash?"

The voice was that of Peter Graul. He was in high humor. The act had gone off very well, and the substitute for Roundel had played *Pooh-Bah* as well as the regular baritone could have done it.

"I haven't made a mash yet, Mr. Graul. Not yet. But I hope to do so before I'm many hours older," answered Owney, slowly, and with a significant smile.

"Ah, you rascal! That voice of yours is enough to captivate any girl. Stay in this company, and you'll find yourself the husband of an heiress before the end of the season, I shouldn't wonder."

With a dig in the detective's ribs, he was walking away, chuckling to himself, when Owney called him back:

"Mr. Graul."

"Well, Flute?"

"I should like a few words with you."

"Go ahead, then. I shall have to call 'Second Act' directly. Time is precious just now."

"I won't waste much time."

Owney drew the stage-manager close to him, and whispered in his ear.

"No?" exclaimed Graul, starting back in astonishment. "You can't mean it."

"But I do. Will you help me?"

"Help you? Why, what have you to do with it? Why not tell the police?"

"Because I'm—"

Again the young man whispered.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"Fact, I assure you. Now, will you help me?"

"Will I? Won't I?"

"Good! I came here to-night for these reasons. One was to save you trouble in the performance—"

"Very much obliged to you, I'm sure, Mr.—"

Owney held up his finger warningly.

"Graham," continued Graul, with a smile.

"There's nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, I'm pretty sharp," chuckled the stage-manager. "You can't often catch Peter Graul asleep."

The other two reasons that brought me to the theater were to see whether my men came here, and further, if they did, to throw them off their guard."

"Good!" ejaculated Graul, approvingly.

"Now—"

"Second act!" suddenly yelled the stage-manager, in a stentorian voice.

Owney started. Then he saw the reason that Graul had so rudely interrupted the conversation, and he felt a great deal more respect than before for the stage-manager's intelligence. One or two of the chorus men were hanging about very close to them, and with the curiosity of their kind, were trying to bear what was being said.

The conference between Owney and Mr. Graul was broken up for the time, but they managed to exchange a few remarks during the performance, so that when the curtain fell at last a plan was perfected between them.

The audience poured out of the theater, and a quarter of an hour after the performers began to leave the stage door.

Opposite the door, in the deep shadow, two figures could have been discovered by any one with very sharp eyes, provided he was on the lookout for watchers.

Actors are always in a hurry to get away from the theater when their work is done.

The chorus girls left in groups of three and four, or singly. The latter were generally joined by lovers or brothers, who saw them safely home.

The two men opposite kept their eyes on the doors, but seemed uninterested in all who emerged, until a young man in the dress that they both recognized as that of "Git Thar" Owney stepped lightly out of the doorway and walked away at a swift gait.

He passed under a lamp, and the two men saw the blonde curls of the young detective, with other personal characteristics that assured them that he was indeed the personage that they were after.

"Curse him! We'll have him now!" hissed Roundel, as, with Ezra Piper at his heels, he went on the track of "Git Thar" Owney with the dogged determination of a sleuth-hound.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNSUSPECTED WATCHER.

THE young man walked very fast, until he reached Broadway. Then he got on a passing car that was going down-town. The two pursuers instantly followed, remaining on the platform, while Owney went inside and sat down, evidently unconscious of their presence.

At a cross street some distance below Union Square Owney alighted, brushing past Roundel and Piper, but evidently not seeing them. As before, they sprang after him, until he reached a quiet house, closely-shuttered and dark, in a narrow part of a dingy thoroughfare.

He looked at the house carelessly, in the manner of any casual passer-by, and was passing on, when his two pursuers sprung upon him, and while Roundel pulled him back by tightening an arm around his neck, Piper threw a sack over his head and muffled him so effectually that any outcry would be impossible.

"Mind he doesn't pull a weapon," whispered the bigger villain, "and help me take him in."

"All right. He can't reach his pockets. I'm taking care of that," returned Piper, as he pulled the sack further down and pinioned the arms of the captive.

Roundel whistled softly with a peculiar intonation, at the same time dragging Owney close to a small cellar door that was scarcely noticeable beneath the parlor windows of the darkened house.

An answering whistle of the same kind came from below, and the cellar door was cautiously pulled inward a little way.

"All right!" wheezed Piper.

"Who sez so?" asked a gruff voice from within.

"It's all right!" growled Roundel. "Open the door, but don't show a light."

"Oh! Very well, captain, ez long ez I know. But I ain't a-goin' to be caught disobeying my superiors, an' I was told ter let nobody in 'cept Tiger Jim an' anybody ez he might bring with him," grumbled the invisible person inside.

At this juncture the patience of Norman Roundel gave way. He kicked open the cellar door, savagely, and throwing his captive down the two or three steps that led to the cellar, pulled the door shut with a bang, and walked away briskly, with Piper close behind him.

"That's settled him, eh, Jim?" wheezed Piper, almost out of breath.

"I hope so. But now for the job. You have your tools with you all right, I suppose?"

"Cert."

"Come along, then."

Cautiously they made their way to the basement of the bank, and squeezing between the brick supports, described in a previous chapter, at last found themselves in Mr. Argent's private apartment behind the main room.

"Keep behind the door, out of sight, while I look around," whispered Roundel.

"All right."

Roundel lay flat upon the floor, and crawled out of the little room with the caution and silence of a Sioux Indian. His first act was to lower the gas-jets somewhat.

He reached the front door, and crouching down behind the wooden portion of it, was debating within himself whether it would be safe to put his face to the glass and look out, when he thought of the key-hole.

He put his eye to it; could see no one. He listened intently; could hear nothing except the tramp of footsteps on the frosty ground, some distance away, but sounding distinctly in the clear, sharp, wintry air.

"Um! All right!" he thought, as he turned away to crawl back.

Then he started, and with a howl of trepidation that he could not repress, drew a long dagger from his sleeve, and waited.

Near the door, standing in deep shadow, he could discern the figure of a man, with arm upraised.

"What's the trouble?" asked Piper, in a low wheeze from the inner room.

But the other did not answer. His eyes were fixed stonily upon the mysterious stranger who was apparently waiting to deal a blow upon the burglars that would end their career of usefulness forever as far as this world is concerned.

"What's the excitement?" repeated Ezra.

No answer.

"Well, I'll be darned if I'm going to stay here if you don't answer me," he growled.

Roundel was still watching the unknown man in the shadow, who, with his hand in the threatening attitude it had assumed when the burglar first saw him, was apparently waiting for an aggressive movement from Roundel ere he struck.

Piper did not waste any more words. Dropping upon his stomach, in imitation of his partner, he wormed himself out of the little room and crawled toward the door.

He saw Roundel crouching, with his big knife in his hand.

"What's the racket, Jim?" asked the tenor, in astonishment. "What are you going to do with that knife? I don't see no one that needs carving. And we'd better hurry up over our work. It's after 12 o'clock, and we have enough to do to keep us going for several hours."

The other did not reply. He seemed to be petrified by a fear that was more than human. Piper could not understand the strange actions of his partner in crime, but he felt that something must be done at once.

Everything was quiet outside, so he did what his professional experience had long since taught him was unsafe—he got up from the floor and walked in the direction of the door and Roundel.

He did not go straight toward the door, however, but describing a circle, brushed aside the ambushed figure, with its arm upraised, with a coolness that seemed to break the spell under which Roundel labored, and caused him to spring to his feet in amazement.

"What a fool I am!" he ejaculated, between his clinched teeth.

"Eh?"

"Just a coat hanging on a peg, with a stick pushed through the sleeves to prevent wrinkling."

Ezra Piper grinned.

"Oho! And you thought it was some one laying for us, eh? Well, that is a pretty good joke on Tiger Jim."

"Shut up and get to work," was Roundel's wrathful response, as he tore the coat from its place and threw it on the floor, spitefully.

Piper knew his companion's violent temper, and did not argue further with him. He retreated to the inner room and waited for Roundel to join him.

Had there been any one watching the bank from the street, the two intruders must inevitably have been discovered, for in the excitement caused by the discovery of the coat, they had stood up in front of the door with the gaslight, falling full upon them.

"Go behind the counter there and see that they haven't fixed the alarm wires again," commanded Roundel, as he joined his companion in the president's room.

"I'll go and look if you like, but if they are fixed, why the police should be with us now, for we have walked over the spot where the alarm would be worked half a dozen times. You know it extends eight feet from the door of the vault in every direction," grumbled Piper, with the sneer on his face that always maddened Roundel.

"Go and see, curse you!" was all that he replied.

The little man went quickly toward the counter, but had only taken two or three steps when he dropped flat and hissed:

"Lay low! Police!"

Roundel instinctively drew back behind the door of the president's room, but managed to look out without being observed.

"Dobbs!" he muttered. "What is he after, I wonder?"

Dobbs, the police officer, walked majestically across the street, and mounting the steps of the bank, looked through the glass door in a business-like way.

Piper had crawled behind the counter, and Dobbs, after a minute's survey was just turning around to depart, when his eye fell upon the coat that Roundel, in his rage, had thrown down upon the floor.

"Now, I wonder why that coat is there," he reflected. "I could swear it was hanging up against the wall on my last round. I wonder whether I ought to report that."

He stood irresolutely looking at the coat, trying to account for its having been removed until a sudden thought struck him.

"Of course. Why it must be Dennis. I guess he's knocked it down, and was too lazy to pick it up. I bet he's asleep up there in that cuddy-hole of his. I wish I could see him."

Dobbs shook the door violently.

"I'll wake him up, if I have to wake up the whole street at the same time."

He kept his eyes fixed on Dennis Carrigan's little hutch over the vault, but could not see anything of the watchman.

Dobbs had not seen "Git Thar" Owney or any one connected with the bank since the preceding night, and was wholly ignorant of the exciting events that had involved the detective, the president of the bank and Dennis Carrigan himself.

He rattled the door again, and shouted through the keyhole. "Dennis! Dennis!"

No answer. Roundel and Piper both kept so still that they hardly dared to breathe.

Dobbs flattened his nose against the glass of the door and tried to make out the watchman in his hutch.

"Darned fool! Why don't he go away?" muttered Roundel, impatiently, as he watched the policeman through a chink in the door.

"What's that, Tiger?" asked Piper, whose hearing was almost supernaturally acute.

"Shut up!" was the gruff response.

Dobbs had ceased rattling the door, but had kept his face flattened against the glass. He now turned the rays of his lantern upon the interior of the bank, and sent a stream of light in every direction.

"It's all right, Mr. Dobbs," commented Roundel, inaudibly. "If you can discover anything with that lantern, you are welcome to it."

"He's going away," observed Piper, in a tone of relief. "But he was a long time making up his mind to it."

In truth, Dobbs had pocketed his lantern and was standing on the steps with his back to the door as if in doubt as to his next proceeding. Then he walked deliberately down the steps and disappeared.

"Gone!" ejaculated Piper, as he crawled from behind the counter.

"Get to work, quickly, now," was all his companion replied.

"Well, watch that door."

"I'm watching. Is the electrical business all right? That's what you were going to see when Dobbs put in an appearance."

"That's so. I had forgotten that."

With a quick movement, the flabby-faced little man slipped behind the counter, emerging a moment later with the information that the wires had not been touched since he fixed them the night before.

Then he opened his coat and revealed an assortment of tools of all kinds—crowbars, saws, files, chisels, etc.—hung around him on a belt, and so disposed that no one would suspect their presence as he walked along the street.

In a business-like way, he commenced on the combination lock in the middle of the door. He poked and chipped away, making as little noise as possible, his mallet and the tops of the chisels he used being thickly padded to deaden the sound of blows.

"Drop!" suddenly warned Roundel, as he hid himself behind the wooden portion of the front door.

Piper was behind the counter in a second, remaining there until a chance passenger, who had been the cause of Roundel's warning, had got safely past the building.

"All right!" proclaimed the sentinel, and Piper resumed his work.

He worked away vigorously for ten minutes until the perspiration poured down his forehead, but the chilled steel of which the lock was made had so far resisted all his efforts.

"Tiger!"

"Well?"

"I can't move it."

"You've got to move it."

"I can only do it in one way, and that isn't sure."

"What do you mean—powder?"

"That's what!"

"I would rather do it any other way. I don't think a blast is safe here. This is such a confoundedly quiet neighborhood, that I'm afraid it would bring the police down on us right away."

"You mean Dobbs?"

"No. His beat is a rather long one, and he is at the other end of it by this time. He was put on this morning. I found that out."

"You're pretty smart, Tiger," said Ezra, admiringly. The lesser villain had considerable respect for the ability of his partner.

"Well, Ezra, if it is to be powder, try it at once. We must get into that vault somehow, and if we want to make money we must take chances, I suppose."

"Just as you say, Tiger. I'm working under your orders, you know."

The little man, without more talk, proceeded to drill small holes around the lock, and was paying strict attention to his occupation, when Roundel spoke again.

"If there is any trouble over this, remember that you slide out the back way, and I'll go out through this door—if I can."

"Yes."

"And we'll meet as soon as we can at the crib where we put that cursed tenor-detective."

"Flute?"

"Yes—or Owney—whatever he calls himself."

"All right. This thing will be decided before long, I guess. I've found a soft place in the iron, and it won't be very much trouble to put the dynamite into it."

"Good! Now, Mr. Argent, I think I shall be able to wipe off old scores and make myself rich at the same time," muttered Roundel, in grating tones.

Piper kept on noiselessly with his work, and Roundel, with his eyes fixed on the street, waited patiently for the completion of the preparations for the explosion.

The only sound was that caused by Piper's chisel drilling into the safe, and that was so low as hardly to be distinguishable.

And yet Roundel and Piper were not the only occupants of the bank.

A figure stood straight and rigid behind the door of the president's private apartment, watching the burglars' operations with eyes that seemed to emit a fiery glow in the shadow.

CHAPTER XIII.

WATCHING A CRIME.

WHEN Roundel and Piper threw the young detective down the cellar steps of the house near Broadway a funny thing happened.

The cellar door was closed with a bang, and the man so suddenly made a prisoner rolled helplessly about the floor in pitchy darkness.

"Where the deuce am I?" he asked.

The voice was not that of "Git Thar Owney."

"Faith, an' you're all right," said some one, cheerily. "I don't know the name ov ye, but when I see them shpalpeens uv a Roundel and Piper sind yer flyin' down below, I know ez you're a good mon, d'ye moind."

"Well, get a light and let me see where I am," returned the other. "My name is Peter Graul, and I'm stage-manager at the Euterbia Theater. I just wanted to help a young fellow in my company, and I let him make a fool of me by dressing me up in his clothes, just to throw a couple of scoundrels on the wrong scent. And now I'm here in a cellar in the middle of the night, with a wild Irishman who may kill and eat me for anything I can tell."

"Och, faith! No one will ate yez. Yez are too tough for the jaws uv a decent mon, now Oi'm a-tellin' yez. But what was the name av the young feller ez you helped? I know a very decent b'ye that do be singin' tinor at a thea-ter."

"Arthur Graham is his real name, but he is generally called Flute."

"Fleet, is it, ye say? An' his r'ale name is Arthur Graham, eh? Well, now, don't ye fool yerself. His r'ale name do be 'Git Thar' Owney, an' don't you forget it."

"'Git Thar' Owney? What, the detective?"

"Jist that same, an' no ither, sure as you're not a handsome man."

"Git—Thar—Owney!" repeated Graul, slowly, in intense astonishment. "Well, well!"

As the reader will perhaps have conjectured, the man in whose company Peter Graul had been so unexpectedly thrown was none other than Dennis Carrigan, the watchman at Argent & Co.'s bank. How he came to be in this cellar in Broadway, when we left him in Jersey City a few hours before, will be explained in due time.

He lighted a candle while Graul was speaking, and showed a good-sized room, in which was a kitchen stove, an old table, two or three equally old chairs, a cot-bed in one corner, and a door that might be that of a cupboard or a means of communication with another part of the house, in the rear wall.

"What do you think of this?" asked Dennis, as he put the candle in its candlestick, (made by sticking three nails into a flat piece of wood) upon the table.

"Who the deuce are you?" was Peter Graul's polite question, he ignoring the other's remark.

"Dennis Carrigan, private watchman at a bank down town beyant, lord of the s'ile, an' a Democrat from 'way back!" returned the Irishman, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"And what are you doing here? I should think you ought to be at the bank, attending to your duty."

"Well, be the same token, phwat are yez doing here yerself?"

"True. What am I doing here, I should like to know. Open that cellar flap and let me out."

"Can't do it without ordhers."

"Orders from whom?"

"From a little mon ez ginerally gits his own way—from 'Git Thar' Owney."

"What—Flute?"

"Yis, that same, though I didn't know that

he answered to any sick outlandish name as Fleet, so I didn't."

"But I left him at the theater a little while ago. When did you see him?"

"Sure, I saw him afoore you did this avenin'. Some of them shpalpeens what runs wid Tiger Jim an' de gang brung me over here, after Owney got away from the place in Jersey City, over the river beyant."

"Jersey City—over the river," repeated Graul, in a mystified way.

"Och, sure ye don't know onything about that; but it don't matter. They shoved me in here, an' put me in charge of a b'ye ez I knew in the old dart, but who has gone asthary over here. Well, for the sake uv ould toimes we had a dhrink together."

"Well."

"An' he wanted me to slape well, d'ye moind, so he put a little whoite powdher intil the glass that I was to drink out of. But I didn't drink it."

"No?"

"No. I—I—changed the glasses whin he wasn't looking, and be drank the liquor wid the whoite powdher intil it, an' he wint to slape instid uv me."

Peter Graul enjoyed the joke as much as his companion, and the two indulged in a hearty guffaw in concert.

"But where is the fellow? What did you do with him when he went to sleep?"

"I'll show you."

Dennis went to the door in the rear wall, opened it wide, and—out stepped "Git Thar" Owney:

"Saints presarve us! Where did you come from?"

"Never mind," answered Owney, in business-like tones. "I'm here, and that is enough. Get your overcoat on. Have you got weapons?"

"Yes, I have my pistol. It's the same wan ez I had before."

"Well, see that it is all ready for instant use. You have a handy-billy?"

"I have that."

"Good. Mr. Graul, you told me at the theater to-night that you were willing to help me bring certain criminals to justice."

"Yes."

"Well, now, I am a detective, generally known as 'Git Thar' Owney. I assume the name of Arthur Graham, for stage purposes.

"There is a job on hand to-night, as I have already intimated to you. If you will see me through, you will find it a profitable speculation."

"Profit be hanged! I'll go with you because I like you, Flute, and because you have a better tenor than I have heard in comic opera since my own voice was in its prime," returned Graul, as he seized the young detective's hand in a hearty grip.

"Git Thar" Owney pushed open the outer door a little and reconnoitered.

The street was empty, apparently.

"Light out, and come," he whispered back.

The Irishman at once blew out the candle, and taking Graul by the hand, led him toward the steps.

In another few seconds all were on the street, standing back in the shadow of the house, in obedience to the detective's whispered order.

"All quiet. Come along!" he proclaimed, softly.

The three men walked in the direction taken by the two rascals, Roundel and Piper, some time before, and at last stood within a block of the bank of Argent & Co., looking earnestly in the direction of that institution.

"I would give something to know which is the best way to approach them," muttered Owney, thoughtfully. "Suppose you stroll quietly forward, Dennis, and try and get a look at the inside through the glass doors."

"Sure, an' it's meself as'll find out all about it," acquiesced Dennis, joyfully.

"Stay. I'm afraid you're a little too eager."

The Irishman was very much disappointed, but there was no mistaking the air of quiet command with which the detective signed to him to remain, and Dennis did not care to dispute it.

"Captain!"

It was another voice that broke in with this word. Graul and Corrigan turned around sharply, very much astonished. But the detective simply moved his head, and answered:

"Well?"

A police officer stood in the doorway of a house just behind them, in such deep shadow that no one would be likely to see him unless he had been directed to the spot.

"I have been watching, as you told me last night, and I'm a little suspicious."

"Are you? Well, speak low. Dennis, step into the doorway with him, and Mr. Graul, please stand against the house with me. That's right."

In obedience to these directions, Owney's two companions so disposed themselves as to be unnoticeable from a little distance.

"Now, Dobbs, tell me what you have seen that looks suspicious."

Dobbs—for it was indeed that quiet and faithful officer—drew himself up stiffly in the doorway until he looked like a door-post himself, and spoke in his matter-of-fact way:

"Gas lower than usual."

"Yes. Sure sign of mischief," commented the detective.

"Coat on the floor," went on Dobbs.

"Strange coat?"

"No, sir."

"Whose coat?"

"Office coat, generally worn by Robert Smythe, the assistant-bookkeeper."

"Whereabouts on the floor?"

"Near the peg that it is always hung upon."

"Might have slipped off the peg," suggested Owney.

"No, sir," confidently.

"No? Why?"

"At least four feet from the spot under the peg."

"Ah!"

"Couldn't have fallen down. Must have been thrown to one side by somebody."

"Guess you are right, Dobbs. Very well reasoned."

"That is not all," continued Dobbs.

"Go on, then."

"No watchman there."

"Well?"

"Think he may be in the job."

"Why, you miserable whelp!" broke in Dennis. "Sure, I can lick yez roight here if ye say that me own mother's son, Dennis Carrigan, iver—"

"That will do, Dennis," interrupted Owney. "Dobbs is mistaken this time. How long since you were at the bank?" turning again to Dobbs.

"Ten minutes."

"Um?"

"Git Thar" Owney stood some time in deep reflection. He was morally certain that the robbery of the bank was in progress at that moment, and that he could arrest the thieves.

He knew Tiger Jim of old, and was well aware that a pistol-bullet would be his first greeting unless they could surprise and secure him before he had time to use his weapon.

The detective took Dobbs aside and whispered some directions in his ear.

"Very well, sir," said Dobbs, in his business-like way, as he turned short around and walked deliberately and softly toward the bank without noticing Graul or Dennis.

The three saw him reach the little court by the side of the bank, reference to which has already been made, and disappear.

Owney kept his two companions quiet for another five minutes, and then motioning to them to follow him, went toward the court himself.

"Well, this is an awful place for a respectable man," grumbled Graul, when he found himself being squeezed between the brick pillars under the bank.

"Hush!" whispered Owney, as, pushing aside the carpet that Dobbs had dropped over the hole in the corner of the room when he crawled through a few minutes before, he showed his companions the way into the bank—the identical way by which Roundel and Piper had effected an entrance, and which they imagined was known only to themselves.

CHAPTER XIV.—CONCLUSION.

BLANCHE ARRIVES OPPORTUNELY.

EZRA PIPER, kneeling in front of the great iron door of the vault in Argent & Co.'s bank, had no more idea that any one besides his companion in crime, Norman Roundel, was watching him, than he had that "Git Thar" Owney was anywhere but in the cellar into which he was supposed to have been thrust an hour or so before.

But the shadowy figure behind the door never relaxed its vigilance for an instant, while the eyes seemed to emit sparks as Piper plied his drill and chisels in his unholy work.

Tiger Jim, with his eyes fixed on the glass doors, ready to give warning in case of danger, waited patiently for Piper to drill the holes that were to hold the explosive.

And the mysterious watcher behind the door seemed to have as much patience as anybody, as he noted every movement of Ezra Piper.

"There she is!" proclaimed the little man at

last. "We'll try her at that, anyhow. I should like to have made room for a heavier charge, but this will have to do."

"Hurry up, then."

Tiger Jim's only response was a growl, as he watched Piper introduce the granulated dynamite into the holes that he had drilled in the door of the vault.

"You want to let me know when you're ready, Piper. Don't touch it off without warning me."

"Do you think I am a fool?" asked Piper, ungraciously.

"Something on that order; yes."

A grunt was all the little man vouchsafed, as he filled the holes with powder.

"Are you ready?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Well, then, I'll lay the fuse, touch it off, and we had better get into the cellar from the private room while it goes off."

Piper deftly prepared the fuse which he drew from one of the many hiding-places in his clothing, and felt in his pockets for a match.

As he did so he looked around him in the vacant way peculiar to men who are searching for matches in their vest pockets.

Ezra looked around him carelessly, and then, just as his fingers closed on the match, his gaze became fixed, his lower jaw dropped; his fingers relaxed, and an expression of supernatural horror suffused his countenance. He was evidently petrified with fright.

Roundel was watching the street, and did not at first notice his companion's peculiar actions.

"Ready?" he asked.

No answer.

Roundel looked at Piper and saw his gaze of blank terror.

"What's the matter?"

Piper, in a shrinking way, as if he were trying to withdraw into himself, suffered his head to move slightly and at the same time pointed with trembling finger at the figure behind the door.

Roundel, ever on the alert, swung around, knife in hand.

Ere he could use the weapon, a mighty pair of arms were around him, and he found himself rolling on the floor in the embrace of Dobbs.

Dobbs was a powerful man, but his strength was no match for that of Tiger Jim.

With a sudden twist the latter threw the officer on his back, and then a blow on the head from some heavy missile rendered Dobbs senseless.

"Now, hurry! Light that fuse, and let's get this job finished. No fear of this fool troubling us for a while," observed Roundel, coolly, as he stood up and straightened his ruffled plumes.

"I can't very well cut this fuse," grumbled the little man. "It will burn ten minutes before it reaches the powder."

He lighted the end of it as he spoke, and watched the fire crawling slowly along it toward the powder around the combination lock.

"Why didn't you light it in the middle?" asked Roundel, gruffly.

"True. I never thought of that."

"Of course not. Thinking is not in your line."

Roundel had just uttered this last remark with his usual sneer, when, for the second time, strong arms were clasping his waist.

He struggled desperately, but to no purpose this time. Two men were holding him, and before he thoroughly realized that he was attacked, his two hands were forced together, and a pair of handcuffs encircled his wrists.

Ezra Piper comprehended the meaning of the interruption at once, thus proving that he could think quickly sometimes, Norman Roundel to the contrary notwithstanding.

At one bound he had reached the front door, and in another would have been in the street and possibly safe from pursuit.

But it was not to be. A man sprung after him, and just as he was going through the door seized him by the coat-collar and dragged him back in no gentle fashion.

"Kim in, ye shpalpeen. Be gob. D'ye think ez we're goin' to let yez get away the now, 'fther all the thrubble we've had a-gittin' yez?" said the voice of Dennis Carrigan. "Put up your paws."

Before Ezra knew what the other meant, he found himself wearing handcuffs, and being hauled back into the bank.

"Well, Tiger, here we are," said Piper, as he was brought face to face with his partner.

"Curse your stupidity! We have you to thank for this business," growled Roundel, as he shook his white head threateningly at the flabby-faced little tenor.

"So you had a cold and couldn't sing, eh?"

put in Peter Graul, as he thrust his visage into that of Piper. "I suppose you will be attended to up at State Prison, or else I should have liked the satisfaction of fining you a week's salary."

"Shut up, you old fool!" interposed Roundel.

"Oh, Mr. Norman Roundel, and you are in the burglary business, too, eh? Well, it's a pity, for you have been a useful man in comic opera, and might have made a name for yourself as a baritone if you had stuck to it."

Peter Graul evidently meant what he said, and there was a ring of genuine regret in his tones.

"Never mind, Graul. I'll sing at the Euterpea Theater again when I have served my sentence."

"About fifteen years from now," added Dennis.

"In the mean time, "Git Thar" Owney was trying to revive Dobbs, the policeman.

"You may have murder to answer for, Ezra," said the young detective, impressively. "I don't know whether you have killed him or not."

"I killed him? How do you know I had anything to do with it?" blustered Piper.

"Because I saw you throw that crowbar. I was in the corner over there, coming up the trap from below. My coat got caught by a big nail, and prevented my coming through quickly, or I would have been here to help Dobbs before you knew he was there, and then he would have been saved this ugly crack."

The young detective, while speaking, satisfied himself that the unconscious man was not fatally hurt, but he did not tell Piper so until a judicious application of brandy that he found in Roundel's pocket brought Dobbs to his senses, so that he was able to sit up and look around him.

In obedience to "Git Thar" Owney's directions, Graul and Carrigan each covered his prisoner with a six-shooter, while the detective went to a police alarm that hung against the wall in the private room, and rung for help.

He was not disposed to take the risk of leading his prisoners to the station-house with the small force at his command. There were too many chances of a rescue being attempted.

"Owney," cried Dennis.

"Well?"

"Coom here. I want ter speak to yez, but I can't leave these murtherin' villains alone."

Owney stepped to the side of the Irishman, who whispered a few words in his ear.

"Yes," answered Owney aloud. "I must go over there, at once. At least, as soon as I get these fellows under lock and key. But I know she and her father are safe at present."

"Are they?" muttered Roundel.

Piper did not speak, but a leer that boded no good screwed up his little eyes and made his pasty cheeks look flabbier than ever.

The detective saw it but could not tell what it meant.

"What is that fellow grinning about?" thought the detective, anxiously. "I don't like to see a man of his make-up pleased. It always means mischief."

"Git Thar" Owney was right. It did mean mischief.

Unless a warning was given, and given quickly, the life of the young detective was not worth more than a few minutes purchase.

The fuse lighted by Ezra Piper had nearly reached the dynamite.

The explosion would more than likely kill the detective.

Strange to say, no one save the two burglars had noticed the fire crawling along the cotton toward the spot where but one spark would probably hurl the heavy door out, and send fragments of iron and steel flying in all directions.

Slowly, but surely, the flame crept toward the fatal spot.

"Time those fellows were here from the station. Wish they would come. There is Mr. Argent and his little girl over in Jersey; I must hurry and bring them over. They are safe, perhaps, thanks to my arrangements. But I know the old gentleman will be anxious about the affairs at the bank. Well, thank heaven! I restored his girl to him, at all events."

Thus mused Owney, and the fire was very near the powder.

"I'll ring up the station again if there is no one here within two minutes."

He took out his watch, and, holding it in his hand, prepared to watch the two minutes go by.

Beware, Owney! You will never see the second hand go twice around its small dial, if you stand where you are.

"Nearly one minute," murmured Owney,

with his gaze fixed on the face of his watch. "Ha! what's that?"

The glass doors in front, which had remained unfastened since Piper tried to escape that way, were burst violently open, and a young girl bounded into the bank, and pulled "Git Thar" Owney away from his position before the vault door.

Ere he could express his surprise, the girl had pulled something from the floor, and was stamping on it with all her force.

The fuse was extinguished, and "Git Thar" Owney was saved.

The girl saw that she had removed the danger, and then, under the influence of a natural reaction, fell into the young detective's arms in a dead faint.

"Shoot those fellows through the head if they give you any trouble," commanded Owney, whose experience had long since told him that any unwonted bustle was favorable to the escape of prisoners.

"Faith, an' we will that," returned Dennis Carrigan, cheerily. "I'd jist loike to break the head av this little rooither, fer loock!"

Ezra Piper snarled, but the Irishman shook his fist threateningly, and the flabby-faced tenor subsided.

"My daughter! Where is my daughter?" broke in another voice, and Mr. Argent entered the bank hastily.

"I am here, dear father," murmured Blanche Rogers, or, rather, Lucy Argent. "We shall never be parted again, shall we?"

The banker's only answer was to clasp her to his bosom.

"You know, father, when we managed to break the lock of the door of that house in Jersey, I felt sure that there was trouble here, and that somehow I could be of use. But for that I should have been content to wait until 'Git Thar' Owney came back for us, as he promised."

"Yes, you disobeyed my orders, but as you have undoubtedly saved my life, I suppose I must forgive you."

"But I will not! Confound you for a meddler," hissed Tiger Jim, gnashing his teeth in impotent rage.

"Here you are," exclaimed Owney, as half a dozen policemen walked hastily up the steps and entered the bank.

The officers seized the two prisoners in a matter-of-fact way, and in less than half an hour Tiger Jim and Piper were securely locked up.

"Now, Mr. Argent, is there anything more that I can do for you?" asked the detective, as having locked up the bank, with Dennis Carrigan remaining behind in his regular position of watchman, he stood in Mr. Argent's parlor at his residence, while Lucy hung lovingly on her father's arm, as he sat in his own arm-chair before the cheerful open grate.

"Owney, what more could you do for me? You have restored to me my child, and you have saved the bank from a wholesale robbery."

"And caught two fellows for whom I have been looking for a year. I have done as much for myself as I have for you in that matter, Mr. Argent."

"Perhaps so! Perhaps so! But Lucy and I will always consider you the best friend we ever had. Won't we, Lucy?"

"Indeed we will, papa. It has been an awful twenty-four hours for us, but I don't care as long as it has ended all right. Besides, it will be something to tell the girls when I go back to the Academy, as you say I must for another year. What a story I can make of our adventures, papa, with fictitious names."

Lucy laughed joyously as she spoke.

"Ah, Lucy, Lucy! Full of your nonsense as ever. Well, you would not be my own girl, were you otherwise, I suppose."

"I suppose not," was Lucy's demure response.

Norman Roundel, alias "Tiger Jim," and his partner Ezra Piper, were both sent to Sing Sing Prison for long terms, and the police hoped that the gang to which they belonged was broken up. Whether it was or not we may see in future.

"Flute" was the name of the tenor who played the part of Nanki-Poo at the Euterpea Theater for many successive weeks, and the public indorsed the opinion of the stage-manager, Peter Graul, that his voice was one of the best ever heard in comic opera in New York.

No one around the theater except Graul ever knew his real name, or that, besides the popularity he had acquired as a singer and actor, he had won fame in sterner fields of action as the lightning detective, "Git Thar" Owney.

THE END.

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